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INACH

ANNUAL SUMMIT REPORT

Vilnius, 2026

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INACH Annual Summit 2026 ‘Digital Violence and Hate Speech in the Age of AI: Challenges, Regulation and Platform Responsibility’

Opening of the Annual Summit



The INACH Annual Summit was opened by **Philippe Schmidt, Chair of the INACH Board**, who thanked INACH member LGL, the INACH Secretariat, the sponsors, speakers, panellists and participants for their contributions to the event.

Philippe emphasised the importance of protecting democratic values, human rights and vulnerable communities in an online environment increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence. He highlighted the diversity of INACH’s members, whose different national backgrounds and areas of expertise are among the network’s greatest strengths. For almost 25 years, INACH has provided a space for civil society to exchange knowledge, develop shared strategies and make its voice heard at European and international levels.

Against a changing European regulatory landscape, Philippe reflected on the opportunities presented by the Digital Services Act and the AI Act. These frameworks raise an important question for civil society: how can organisations use them to achieve meaningful change? CSOs are often among the first to identify emerging forms of online hate and digital violence, and their experience must inform discussions about the future of the digital environment.

By bringing together CSOs, policymakers, regulators, technology experts and researchers, the summit provided an opportunity to strengthen this dialogue and develop common

responses. Philippe recalled the value of exchanges at previous summits and stressed that, just as online hate and technology cross borders, cooperation must do the same.



Vladimir Simonko, Director of the Lithuanian LGBTIAQ rights organisation LGL, welcomed participants to Vilnius and thanked INACH, the sponsors, speakers and guests for their contributions to the summit. He also expressed his gratitude to the City of Vilnius for supporting the event and helping bring this important discussion to the city.

Vladimir emphasised that, for LGBTIAQ people and other communities affected by discrimination, online hate is not an abstract technological problem. It contributes to an atmosphere in which hostility becomes increasingly normalised. Addressing this requires shared responsibility: alongside civil society, online platforms, national authorities, European institutions and technology developers must all play their part.

He called for transparent and effective implementation of the Digital Services Act and the AI Act, with human rights embedded from the outset. Communities affected by these systems should have a meaningful role in shaping them, rather than being treated merely as sources of data or consulted only after harm has occurred. Their experiences must inform the policies and technologies that affect their lives.

Closing his welcome, Vladimir encouraged participants to take some time to explore rainy Vilnius, the city LGL calls home, and wished everyone an inspiring summit.

Keynote Speech: 'The Greatest Heist in History: How Broligarchs and Algorithms are Hijacking our Humanity'

BY THORDIS ELVA, EQUAL RIGHT ACTIVIST, CO-FOUNDER AND CHAIR OF THE NORDIC DIGITAL RIGHTS AND EQUALITY FOUNDATION



Thordis opened with a personal story about the support she experienced through social media. While hospitalised in Sweden with complications during a twin pregnancy, she was told that her twins had only a 1% chance of survival. Her Instagram posts reached far beyond family and friends, drawing support from what she described as an "army of light". Both children survived, and she associated that extraordinary outcome with the solidarity that had surrounded her. For Thordis, this experience demonstrated the capacity of online spaces to connect people through empathy and care.

Against this background, she expressed deep concern about the influence of powerful technology owners, whom she described as the "broligarchy", and the amplification of hateful and divisive content. She argued that algorithmic systems can give disproportionate visibility to right-wing political messaging, potentially contributing to the rise of the far right. As more people turn to social media for news, she warned that personalised recommendations can create separate information environments, exposing users to different versions of events, often mixed with disinformation.

Thordis also highlighted the imbalance between platforms and the civil society organisations working to hold them accountable. She argued that DSA enforcement relies heavily on civil society's ability to monitor harms and gather evidence, without ensuring adequate funding for this work. Civil society should complement regulatory oversight; she stressed but should not be expected to substitute for properly resourced authorities.

To address this funding gap, she proposed exploring mechanisms through which platforms contribute to the costs of independent oversight, including levies linked to advertising revenue. Drawing comparisons with arrangements in other regulated sectors, she argued

that companies benefiting from the digital environment should also contribute to safeguarding it.

Her central message was that empathy is essential to democracy. She linked the dehumanisation of minorities to the erosion of public solidarity, warning that reduced empathy can make restrictions on their rights easier to justify. Preserving the ability to recognise the humanity of others, including those with whom we disagree, is therefore fundamental to protecting democratic life.

High Level Panel: 'Gender Equality and Democratic Resilience in the Digital Age'

MODERATED BY TAMAS BERECZ, DIRECTOR OF INACH
WITH ANNA DE MARCHI (EUROPEAN COMMISSION DIRECTORATE GENERAL JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS),
DEVIKA PARTIMAN (STEMP OP EEN VROUW/VOTE FOR A WOMAN),
MATTEO TRACCHI (COUNCIL OF EUROPE),
MAX KORTEMAN (POSTX SOCIETY).



The discussion during the panel explored how online hate affects political participation, how platform systems amplify harmful content, and what stronger cooperation between institutions and civil society could achieve.

Devika highlighted the wider democratic consequences of online hate. Politicians can contribute to hostile public discourse while also becoming targets themselves, with women, people of colour and LGBTQ+ people facing abuse. Visibility increases exposure, and the effects extend beyond the person targeted: girls and women who witness attacks on politicians become reluctant to enter public life. Drawing on Stem op een Vrouw's experience, she explained that online hate

can also discourage women from seeking more prominent roles, including within municipal politics. These chilling effects reinforce existing inequalities in political participation.

Max described a digital environment in which recommender systems and coordinated inauthentic behaviour can amplify divisive and hateful content. During monitoring of the March 2026 municipal elections in the Netherlands, his organisation observed accounts posting in Dutch that had previously been active in other languages and electoral contexts. He stressed that these networks operate continuously and across borders, while civil society monitoring is often restricted by short-term funding, national boundaries or individual election cycles. Delayed enforcement compounds the problem: by the time an unlawful political advertisement is removed, it may already have reached a substantial audience.

The discussion also addressed less obvious forms of manipulation. Max described impersonation accounts whose content blurs the boundaries between satire, fan activity, disinformation and hate speech. Such accounts can make it difficult for users to distinguish authentic political communication from misleading content, contributing to distrust in politicians and democratic institutions.

Anna explained how the Digital Services Act (DSA) creates a framework for addressing risks beyond the legality of individual posts. Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) must assess systemic risks arising from their services and take appropriate measures to mitigate them, including risks affecting fundamental rights, civic discourse and well-being. This requires attention to social context, emerging research and evidence from civil society. The Commission's investigation into Grok's integration into X was discussed as an example of scrutiny focused on the wider risks associated with platform functionalities.

On elections, Anna described efforts to engage with Member States ahead of voting periods, improve preparedness and encourage moderation that reflects national and local contexts. The discussion highlighted the importance of rapid responses to incidents, including those involving political advertising and national electoral rules. Participants also noted that developing shared understandings of coordinated manipulation remains a challenge, particularly when harmful practices evolve faster than institutional responses.

Matteo presented two Council of Europe Recommendations adopted in March 2026: one on equality and artificial intelligence, and another on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. The former addresses discrimination throughout the lifecycle of AI systems; the latter builds on existing standards, including the Istanbul

Convention, to strengthen responses to violence enabled or amplified by technology. Although non-binding, the Recommendations offer practical guidance for strengthening national policies and institutional responses.

A recurring theme was the gap between available reporting mechanisms and users' experience of them. Anna outlined the different avenues for addressing illegal content, breaches of platform rules and broader systemic harms. Devika challenged the effectiveness of these routes in practice, describing repeated reports that produced little visible action. She warned that unsuccessful reporting can discourage people from seeking further support or using other complaint mechanisms. Matteo emphasised that reporting nevertheless remains important for documenting patterns, supporting victims and building an evidence base. He also discussed work on practical guidance for investigating criminalised hate speech and gathering evidence, with opportunities for civil society involvement.

The panellists agreed that cooperation must reflect the interconnected nature of the threats. Devika pointed to the overlap between misogyny, anti-LGBT+ hostility and other hateful narratives, arguing that responses require alliances across movements and sectors. She described cooperation between feminist, LGBT+ and trans organisations in the Netherlands as an example of building support beyond a single organisation's usual networks. Matteo similarly highlighted civil society's role in Council of Europe initiatives, including No Hate Speech Week, which brings together practitioners, researchers, policymakers and regulators to exchange experience and explore solutions. Matteo also highlighted the Council of Europe's work on a practical guide to investigating criminalised hate speech. The guide aims to help practitioners gather evidence and prepare cases for court, while offering opportunities for civil society organisations to contribute their expertise and support access to justice.

The discussion closed with several priorities: sustained funding for monitoring beyond election periods, continued dialogue between institutions and civil society, stronger responses to reports, and greater public understanding of how online content is selected and amplified. Devika called for more awareness of options to move away from algorithmically curated feeds, while Max stressed that online visibility should not be mistaken for representative public opinion. Anna also referred to efforts to broaden the EU Framework Decision for Tackling Hate Speech and Hate Crime. Across these contributions, the central message was that protecting democratic participation requires both effective institutional

action and lasting support for the organisations documenting harms and assisting those affected.

Panel: 'ODS-bodies research on appealing online hate speech under the DSA'

MODERATED BY EMRAH GURSEL, HEAD OF FUNDRAISING AND PARTNERSHIPS INACH
WITH THOMAS HUGHES (APPEALS CENTRE EUROPE), ANNA TATAR (NEVER AGAIN ASSOCIATION), PETRA KOVACIKOVA (DIGIQ)

The Panel explored how Out-of-court Dispute Settlement Bodies under the DSA can support organisations challenging platform moderation decisions. Contributions from the panellists highlighted both the value of independent review and the obstacles that remain when platforms fail to act on its findings.



Thomas explained that users and organisations can challenge decisions to leave content online or to remove it. According to figures shared during the panel, nine INACH members had used this route over the preceding year, with Appeals Centre Europe overturning platform decisions in approximately 80% of their cases. Thomas linked this high proportion to members' expertise in recognising hate speech and understanding its context and recurring patterns. Beyond individual cases, these decisions can provide evidence for advocacy and research: repeated failures to remove hateful content can help identify potential systemic risks that platforms need to address.

Petra described the practical difficulties DigiQ encounters when reporting hate speech. Responses can be slow, reports may receive no meaningful follow-up, and some content is only geoblocked. Even when removal eventually occurs after weeks of waiting, the content

may already have reached a large audience. Independent review by ACE has helped validate DigiQ's assessments, but Petra reported that platforms often failed to implement the resulting decisions. She also highlighted inconsistent moderation outcomes, with severe cases remaining online while less clear-cut content was removed. For DigiQ, documenting these experiences strengthen advocacy and provides evidence against which platforms' public claims about moderation improvements can be assessed.

Anna shared the NEVER AGAIN Association's experience of submitting 250 disputes in 2025, with the dispute settlement body agreeing with its assessment in 64% of cases. Of 49 disputes submitted in 2026, 19 had been reviewed at the time of the panel, and all 19 had resulted in the platform decision being overturned. She acknowledged that sustained monitoring and reporting can be exhausting, while emphasising the satisfaction of seeing hateful content removed and racist accounts closed. The organisation prioritises accounts with substantial reach since those do the most damage to society.

Thomas identified the non-binding nature of dispute settlement decisions as a central challenge. He emphasised the requirement for platforms to engage in good faith and the importance of regulatory scrutiny and enforcement. Access to disputed content presents another obstacle: of approximately 1,000 cases from INACH members reviewed by Appeals Centre Europe, platforms had made the relevant content available in around 700 cases, leaving roughly 300 without access. Platforms offered different explanations, including an inability to locate the content or objections concerning the scope of the dispute. Thomas noted that engagement varied between platforms and that Appeals Centre Europe was not handling cases involving X at the time because of ongoing litigation.

The panel underlined how individual disputes can contribute to wider platform accountability. Thomas described submitting evidence to the European Board for Digital Services, including material from INACH members, and using transparency reporting and media engagement to draw attention to moderation failures. The discussion showed that independent review can validate civil society's reporting and reveal recurring problems, but its practical impact depends on platform cooperation, access to content and effective DSA enforcement.

Thematic Discussions

Summit participants were divided into small groups; each assigned a topic to explore through guided questions. They first examined the factors contributing to the issue, before developing recommendations and possible solutions. The mix of national backgrounds and professional

expertise enriched the discussions, bringing varied perspectives to the development of practical strategies.

Theme A: Beyond takedowns: When does online hate become a systemic risk?

The group explored how individual moderation failures can be brought together to demonstrate wider platform problems. Participants identified persistently low removal rates for violating content, repeated failures to address reported problems, and business models that reward hateful content as potential indicators of systemic risk. They also raised the question of whether a risk confined to one national context can still be systemic, highlighting the importance of examining national and linguistic differences.



Participants emphasised that patterns in platform responses deserve closer investigation. These include recurring failures to act and differences in the treatment of varying topics or communities. Content concerning Palestine was raised as an example of potentially unequal moderation. Such observations could inform further analysis of whether platform policies and practices produce inconsistent protection or enforcement.

The group identified several complementary sources of evidence for determining systemic risks: out-of-court dispute settlement bodies' interactions with platforms, platform transparency reports, whistleblower testimonies, investigative journalism, academic research and VLOPs risk assessment reports. Bringing these sources together with civil society monitoring could help connect individual experiences to recurring patterns and the platform systems underlying them.

Participants recommended mapping the European Commission's approach to identifying systemic risks and its related enforcement actions, alongside developing clearer risk categories and shared methods for analysing evidence. They proposed involving NGOs and relevant international groups in validating this analysis. The group also called for more equal partnerships and direct exchanges between platforms and civil society organisations.

Finally, participants proposed a Solidarity Mitigation Fund to support work addressing these risks, with platform taxation raised as a possible funding source. Together, the recommendations focused on stronger evidence, more meaningful cooperation and sustainable resources for moving beyond individual takedowns towards systemic accountability.

Theme B: What Should Platform Accountability Look Like by 2030?



Participants considered what a stronger platform-accountability system should look like by 2030. They proposed an approach grounded in human rights, combining different forms of oversight, rapid responses to harm and sustainable funding. A central priority was to make accountability accessible to users, while giving independent authorities and civil society the resources needed to scrutinise platforms effectively.

The group called for simpler reporting mechanisms that connect users to the wider DSA accountability system. One proposal was a standardised "three-click" reporting tool, designed to make reporting straightforward and consistent across platforms. Participants also raised the possibility of an educational course or assessment for users whose accounts have been blocked, although the details of this proposal remained open.

Stronger legal and investigative mechanisms were another priority. Participants proposed collective legal action, including class actions, alongside mechanisms to support the funding of civil society organisations. They also called for better cooperation with law enforcement and faster judicial authorisation for access to relevant data. Independent authorities were identified as an essential part of this system, providing oversight beyond platforms' own processes.

To strengthen civil society's participation, the group suggested grants for national focal points that could engage with regulatory processes under the DSA, AI Act, DMA and related frameworks. This would help organisations contribute their expertise more consistently and connect national experiences with regulatory scrutiny. Participants also emphasised the need for systems capable of recognising and mitigating automated and AI-driven harms.

The discussion extended beyond oversight of existing platforms to the structure of the digital environment itself. Participants favoured greater diversity in social media services, stronger measures against monopolisation and interoperability between platforms. They also explored creating alternative online spaces that would reduce dependence on dominant technology companies. These proposals reflected an ambition to distribute power more broadly and give users greater choice.

Three priorities emerged for the period leading to 2030: build accessible reporting and remedy mechanisms; strengthen independent oversight, legal action and sustainably funded civil society participation; and reduce concentrations of platform power while improving responses to automated harms. Together, these proposals outlined an accountability system that would combine institutional scrutiny with practical tools and greater choice for users.

Theme C: Competing Narratives & the Battle for Democratic Norms



Participants explored how civil society can communicate the need for platform accountability while safeguarding freedom of expression. They questioned the framing of online safety and free expression as opposing goals, emphasising that harassment and intimidation can themselves silence people and undermine equal participation.

At the same time, participants highlighted legitimate concerns about restrictions on expression. Civil society organisations can face pressure or criminalisation for criticising governments, making it essential that measures addressing online harm also protect dissent. The discussion underlined the importance of clear definitions and equal protection for different communities, while acknowledging that understandings of harm vary across contexts.

Participants recommended explaining civil society's work through the language of rights, empowerment and participation. Rather than focusing exclusively on removing content, organisations could highlight how they help people exercise their rights and participate safely online. Clear communication should also distinguish between addressing illegal content and asking platforms to apply their own rules on harmful content consistently.

Human rights and empathy were identified as foundations for convincing counternarratives. Participants favoured messages that explain how tackling digital violence protects people's ability to speak and engage, while taking concerns about censorship seriously. They also recognised the positive potential of online spaces for learning and connection. Digital literacy could help users understand how recommendations shape their information environment and make informed use of available controls.

The discussion suggested three priorities: develop clear, empathetic narratives linking accountability to freedom of expression and equal participation; strengthen public understanding of online harms and users' rights; and demonstrate that democratic regulation protects both vulnerable communities and legitimate criticism.

Theme D: Shared responsibility or accountability gap? Who should keep digital spaces safe?

Participants highlighted the distance between having rules in place and ensuring that someone takes responsibility for implementing them. Platforms' inconsistent application of their terms and conditions, alongside gaps in enforcement and access to justice, can leave users and civil society organisations carrying the burden of pursuing remedies.



Platforms were expected to invest in effective moderation and apply their rules consistently. Participants described cases in which educational material about sexual violence was restricted while the harmful content it documented remained available. They also called for prevention through platform design, including measures to reduce the amplification of extreme content. User education was considered useful, but the discussion stressed the wider structural effects of algorithms and AI.

Public authorities were expected to ensure that legal protections work in practice. Participants called for effective sanctions and visible enforcement, with clear explanations that help people understand what regulators are doing. For communities whose confidence

in institutions has already been damaged, accessible justice and demonstrable action were seen as essential to rebuilding trust.

Civil society's role included documenting harms, building an evidence base, supporting users and cooperating with public bodies. Participants stressed that these contributions require sustainable funding and practical support. Shared training and guidance on reporting, preparing cases and using dispute mechanisms could strengthen organisations' capacity, with INACH suggested as a facilitator of this exchange.

Participants also proposed directing resources from fines towards enforcement capacity, civil society and public education. Continuous training was considered necessary to keep pace with technological change. Whether platforms should participate in developing solutions remained an open question, with arguments both for their involvement and for exploring alternatives.

Three priorities emerged: strengthen platforms' responsibility for consistent moderation and safer design; ensure accessible, effective and visible enforcement by public authorities; and resource civil society's contribution through sustained funding, training and clearer cooperation mechanisms.

Theme E: The new information disorder: algorithms, generative AI, disinformation & online hate

Participants described how harmful narratives often begin with half-truths or legitimate concerns, which can gradually connect to broader conspiracy narratives and hate. Current conflicts, particularly Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the conflict involving Iran, were discussed as examples of environments in which disinformation, conspiracy narratives and hate can reinforce one another.

An important observation was that apparently different conspiracy narratives frequently share common underlying frames. Narratives about "protecting the family", "saving children", "protecting women" or defending traditional values can provide bridges between different communities and grievances. Participants discussed examples ranging from anti-LGBTQ+ narratives and "pedo-hunting" to the manosphere, where content about men's health or self-improvement can potentially develop into increasingly rigid ideas about masculinity, misogyny and far-right narratives.



Participants therefore highlighted the importance of recognising the pathways between seemingly benign, positive or protective narratives and more harmful content, rather than looking only at individual pieces of hate speech or disinformation. Antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+ narratives were identified as recurring elements across several of these ecosystems. Generative AI adds another layer by making synthetic propaganda easier and cheaper to produce and distribute.

The second group identified similar patterns across different national contexts. They distinguished between two related developments: AI-generated/synthetic content and the use of AI within recommender systems. Participants argued that these can amplify one another: increasingly convincing synthetic content is produced at scale while algorithmic systems determine how it is distributed and amplified.

A broader concern was the potential erosion of a shared information environment. As distinguishing authentic from manipulated content becomes more difficult, the problem may move beyond believing individual pieces of disinformation towards declining confidence that reliable information can be found at all.

Participants noted that the consequences are not evenly distributed and discussed vulnerabilities affecting migrants, young people, older people, Roma communities, people with lower levels of education and rural populations. Political communication and elections were highlighted as particularly sensitive environments.

Potential responses discussed included stronger media literacy and awareness raising; better social-listening and monitoring capabilities for practitioners, including initiatives such as the European Observatory of Online Hate; encouraging healthier relationships with social

media; and addressing the role of recommender systems. Participants questioned whether algorithmically curated feeds should remain the default and discussed giving users' greater ability to switch them off or return to chronological feeds.

Proposed responses included clearer labelling of AI-generated content, including transparency about what has been generated or manipulated and how; greater transparency around recommender systems; stronger media and digital literacy; technological capacity-building for civil society; and stronger consequences for deliberate uses of disinformation in political and electoral contexts.

Romania's annulled presidential election was discussed as an example that also illustrates the difficulty of defining appropriate intervention thresholds. Participants debated where the line should be drawn given that elections increasingly contain some degree of disinformation, synthetic content or inauthentic behaviour. The discussion therefore highlighted the need for clear, proportionate and transparent criteria for intervention to avoid measures intended to protect elections inadvertently undermining confidence in democratic processes.

Theme F: When platforms fail from advocacy to enforcement

The participants were combined and deliberately challenged to think beyond familiar interventions such as flagging, reporting and content removal. While these approaches can produce meaningful individual successes, participants felt they do not sufficiently address the structural conditions that enable harmful content to be produced, amplified and monetised at scale.

The discussion consequently shifted strongly towards responsibility and accountability. Participants argued for greater pressure on technology companies, political actors and the wider sector to accept responsibility for the environments they create or regulate. Ideas ranged from stronger public accountability ("name and shame") to economic measures, including taxation of social-media profits and potentially taxation connected to large-scale data collection.

Participants also called for faster and more effective enforcement of existing EU rules and penalties, rather than relying primarily on the development of new regulation.



Another discussion concerned the costs borne by civil society organisations when performing work necessitated by harmful online environments. Participants suggested making greater use of provisions allowing recovery of "reasonable expenses" under the Digital Services Act and interpreting these costs realistically. Monitoring, reporting and supporting affected communities require staff, technology, subscriptions, office infrastructure and organisational capacity; these costs should not automatically be absorbed by already resource-constrained civil society organisations.

Finally, the role of algorithmic recommender systems again emerged as a central concern. Participants discussed whether users should have a meaningful right to disable personalised recommendation algorithms, whether non-personalised or chronological feeds should be easily accessible, and potentially whether such feeds should become the default.

Across both rounds, a recurring theme was that preventing hate requires moving further upstream. Hate speech should not only be approached as individual pieces of content requiring moderation after they appear. Disinformation, conspiracy narratives, generative AI, recommender systems and the economic incentives of online platforms form an interconnected ecosystem that can facilitate pathways towards hate.

The discussions therefore pointed towards a combination of individual resilience and media literacy, stronger civil-society capacity, transparency around AI and recommender systems, meaningful user choice, and greater structural accountability for platforms and political actors. For INACH and European policymakers, an important question emerging from the workshop is how to complement established reporting and removal mechanisms with interventions that address the systems and incentives that enable harmful narratives to spread in the first place.