A Fantastic Circus
Fediverse Integration into Public Administration



—Executive Summary—

By FediVariety. Fediverse Integration into Public Administration, version 1.1, October 2026. Coordination by SABOA Foundation; Stichting Ongevraagd Advies. Funded by the NLnet Foundation.

Motives

For two years, a handful of EU institutions ran a social media service of their own. The service worked and cost next to nothing, yet it was shut down in 2024 and nobody picked it up. We investigated the reason behind this and discovered technology and finances played a far smaller role than anticipated. The real issue was political; no one with real authority wanted to be responsible for it.

Subject

In April 2022 the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) launched EU Voice, a message service built on Mastodon, and EU Video, built on PeerTube. Both are part of the "Fediverse", a network of independently run servers that can talk to each other, much like email providers can. You don't need an account to read the posts, and there is no company in the middle choosing what shows up in your feed.

About 40 accounts of EU institutions, agencies and bodies were opened, plus six video accounts. As the European elections approached, the EDPS also let MEPs and political parties in. The pilot closed in May 2024.

Our evidence comes from internal papers obtained under access-to-documents rules and from nine interviews with participants in the pilot. Of the 17 institutions we approached, nine provided material.

Findings

It was cheap and technically easy. The EDPS spent roughly €200,000 over about two years, mostly on staff who were already on the payroll. Servers cost a few thousand euros. Keeping the system running took anywhere from half an hour to half a day a month.

Moderation was manageable, and the tools are built in. Day-to-day moderation meant reviewing content flagged by users, as it would happen on a mainstream platform. Most people we spoke to had seen little hate or illegal content, and the one spam wave was cleared up within hours. With a larger size in followers though also grow challenges: by October 2022 the Commission's communication department was reporting more complaints and trolling, the same pattern any large account faces on any platform. On Mastodon, the protocol puts moderation tools, reporting, account suspension, defederation in the hands of each server, making it a shared responsibility across the network. By publishing clear moderation criteria, an institution can act transparently without becoming the editor of public debate.

Institutions took part half-heartedly. Where institutions simply crossposted from Twitter, engagement stayed low. Interest fell, and in October 2022 the Commission's communication department switched the crossposting off. Shortly afterwards, one original post about the Digital Services Act more than quadrupled that account's followers within days. Even so, several institutions kept asking for the crossposting tool. The Fediverse rewards institutions that come to talk and engage, as its user base is heavily focused on technical topics and civic engagement.

Data protection was not the problem. Data protection authorities led these experiments, and they showed it can be done within the GDPR. Privacy on its own rarely convinces communication teams, who mostly care about reaching an engaged audience.

Nobody at the top backed it. The pilot had working-level coordination through the inter-institutional online communication committee (IOCC), but no mandate above that. As early as June 2021, the EDPS flagged the lack of political support from the European Parliament and from the heads of EU. Without an accountable owner, no successor was found, and the Commission, the EDPS and the Court of Justice now run their own instances. One of our interviewees called the ending a missed opportunity, and we agree.

Our recommendations

We ask decision makers to reduce Europe's reliance on a handful of commercial platforms, and opt instead for true digital public spaces with politically accountable owners, funding that survives election cycles, and visible evidence that public input changes decisions.

Four points for decision-makers:

- **Plus1.** We back the "Plus1" principle, under which institutions stay on their current platforms but also run at least one account on an open, non-commercial network. Baden-Württemberg already works this way, and its state-run instance hosts over forty public bodies. The Fediverse does not compete with Big Tech on reach. It offers a smaller, highly engaged audience of journalists, researchers and civil society focused on public-interest issues.
- **"European" should also mean open.** We were uneasy about the Commission moving the accounts of its President and the ECB's President from Bluesky to W-Social, a for-profit network, when the non-profit, open-source Eurosky existed. Storing data in Europe doesn't mean sovereignty if governance and code remain closed and can not be made accountable to citizens.
- **What makes Plus1 work:** Volunteers and short project grants keep much of it going. The Digital Commons EDIC (launched in December 2025) and the Sovereign Tech Fund pilot could offer something bigger and more lasting.
- **Use Parliament's own tools.** Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions allow Parliament to fund an idea before any legal basis exists. FOSSEPS, a 2021 pilot upgraded in 2024, followed exactly that path.

Advice to Administrators:

- Name three owners from the start: one for strategy, one for daily operations and one for legal compliance.
- Choose a delivery model on purpose: run it in-house, buy it as a managed service, or combine the two.
- Bring the Data Protection Officer in at the design stage, not at the end.
- Publish your moderation and federation rules before launch, including who can decide to cut off another server.
- Budget staff time, not just money, and judge success by interaction rather than follower counts.

Scope and Limits

This is a small qualitative study, and it should be weighed as one. We spoke to nobody from an institution that stayed out, and several of our interviewees were enthusiasts. Mastodon's audience is small and technically minded, so reach falls well short of the commercial platforms. Our policy conclusions go further than the interviews alone can support.

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