

Open letter: solidarity with Autistici/Inventati after “terrorist” designation by the US government

The United States government has designated the Italian non-profit organisation Autistici/Inventati (A/I) as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” for providing digital infrastructure to supposedly “violent far-left militants.” This targeting of A/I is also an attack on independent internet infrastructure, fundamental rights of multiple collectives, safe and secure communications, democratic anti-authoritarian organising and the democratic integrity of the EU. As the largest digital rights network in Europe, we stand in full solidarity with Autistici/Inventati.

What happened?

On 26 August, the United States government designated the Italian non-profit organisation Autistici/Inventati (A/I) as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” for providing digital infrastructure to supposedly “violent far-left militants.”

What is A/I?

A/I is a volunteer-run collective that has been operating from Italy since 2001, providing services like email, mailing lists, hosting, blogs, and other services related to privacy and anonymity to associations, community groups and people across Europe and worldwide. Importantly, it is an anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-militarist organisation opposed to capitalism and authoritarianism, and they only host projects that are compatible with these principles.

A/I’s services are decentralised, not-for-profit, and offer security from surveillance of law enforcement and state overreach. This safe and secure communications infrastructure is a critical alternative to Big Tech platforms and used widely for anti-fascist organising and grassroots social movements, which are already under pressure due to rising authoritarianism globally.

The impact of the designation was felt immediately: A/I’s website is no longer accessible because the US-based Public Interest Registry disabled their domain “autistici.org”. PayPal has seized their account, and the Italian ‘Banca Etica’ might, out of fear of secondary sanctions, close their account, despite the bank’s commitment to human rights.

The obligation imposed on US companies to sever all economic ties with A/I also risks having consequences far beyond the United States. Non-US banks and financial institutions are likely to terminate their relationships with A/I out of concern about potential US secondary sanctions or other regulatory risks. As a result, A/I could effectively become an outcast, losing access to essential services and facing significant difficulties in carrying out its day-to-day operations.

The broader impact

The effect of this designation will not be limited to A/I or those directly using their infrastructure. It speaks to an escalation of massive, institutional attacks on safe and secure communication, alternatives to for-profit Big Tech platforms, democratic organising, and more, which will be felt by the digital rights community and the wider civil society. Concretely, the US attack against A/I threatens:

- **The freedoms of expression, information, assembly and association.** A/I's services are used by a multitude of collectives, campaigners, trade unionists, journalists, researchers, many of whom chose A/I because their work was unsafe or shunned on commercial platforms. Currently, A/I hosts 16,000 mailboxes, 1,500 websites, 5,500 mailing lists, and 10,000 blogs. Attempting to cut off their communications and archives, without due process, undermines Articles 7, 11 and 12 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and puts at risk the important work being done by thousands of organisations and collectives. The target is clearly not just A/I but the wider ecosystem and community they support. These users will not be sanctioned directly, but the association with A/I will affect how banks scrutinise their payments, how 'risky' they are deemed by researchers and journalists, how 'suspicious' they come across while crossing borders – a broad chilling effect delivered through one targeted designation. If independent and secure providers like A/I continue to be attacked, collectives and organisations might be forced to move to commercial Big Tech platforms, exposing them to supercharged levels of surveillance and censorship.
- **Independent internet infrastructure.** This US action undermines Europe's rule of law and directly attacks the EU's intermediary liability law, the Digital Services Act (DSA). It treats the provision of general-purpose communication tools as material support for terrorism. While the US government has started with A/I, it will likely not stop there. This creates a dangerous precedent for non-commercial hosts, registrars and privacy-preserving services across Europe.
- **European sovereignty.** An entity established in the EU, subject to Italian law and to the jurisdiction of Italian and European courts, has been sanctioned by executive decision of a third country. Its effects will be felt in Europe, on European rights-holders, on the health of European democracy, and through European intermediaries. This is yet another way the US is undermining the EU, after months of attacks on the EU's digital laws.

We're calling on:

- 1 The United States government to reverse its decision to designate a digital service provider a terrorist entity, and to take any issue with content hosted by A/I through the established law enforcement frameworks following rule of law, due process and proportionality.
- 2 The EU to defend its civil society. Independent, secure and non-commercial communications infrastructure is vital to the European civic space and democracy. One way to do this is by establishing a standing mechanism to protect civil society organisations established on its territory from third-country designations imposed without judicial process. Council Regulation (EC) No

2271/96 (the Blocking Statute) offers the foundation. Its protection must extend beyond commercial operators to non-profit entities, and to the intermediaries whose compliance gives a foreign designation practical effect on EU territory.

- 3 The government of Italy to publicly defend an organisation established on its territory against extraterritorial measures imposed without any judicial process.
- 4 Financial institutions, internet registrars and infrastructure providers in the EU to refuse to act on third-country designations that have no force in European law. Yielding to financial pressure where no legal obligation exists is a choice and not a necessity.
- 5 Digital, social justice and other civil society organisations and collectives to stand in full solidarity with Autistici/Inventati, recognising the key role that safe and secure decentralised digital infrastructure plays in our collective strive for justice.

A/I has a history of surviving state repression. They have adapted by decentralising their infrastructures to resist censorship, rolling out encryption and minimising data collection to protect their users against state hacking, and educating communities and social movements about digital security. Even though the attack this time is of a much bigger magnitude, we remain hopeful that with collective solidarity and actions by our European governments and the EU, independent digital infrastructure like A/I's can recover and emerge stronger than ever.

Edit: Sadly, on 6 September 2026, A/I announced their decision to shut down and discontinue their services as a result of the designation by the US government.

Signatories

- European Digital Rights (EDRi)
- Osservatorio Nessuno OdV (Italy)
- IT-Pol (Denmark)
- Danes je nov dan (Slovenia)
- Hermes Center (Italy)
- Alternatif Bilişim (Turkey)
- Bits of Freedom (Netherlands)
- NoLog.cz collective (Czechia)
- IuRe / Iuridicum Remedium (Czechia)
- Asociația pentru Tehnologie și Internet (ApTI) (Romania)
- info.nodes (Italy)
- epicenter.works (Austria)
- Electronic Frontier Norway (EFN)
- Homo Digitalis (Greece)
- Privacy Network (Italy)
- petites singularites (Belgium)
- Politiscope (Croatia)
- Chaos Computer Club (Germany)

- Digitalcourage (Germany)
- La Quadrature du Net (France)
- Waag Futurelab (Netherlands)
- DFRI (Sweden)
- D3 – Defesa dos Direitos Digitais (Portugal)
- Open Rights Group (UK)
- Defend Democracy (Netherlands)
- Digitale Gesellschaft (Germany)
- People vs Big Tech (UK/EU)
- Robur cooperative (Germany/international)
- Kamratdataföreningen Konstellationen (Sweden)
- Deutsche Vereinigung für Datenschutz e.V. (DVD) (Germany)
- Vrijdschrift.org (Netherlands)
- Critical Infrastructure Lab – University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University (Netherlands)
- OBC Transeuropa
- Disruption Network Lab (Germany)
- Pangea (Spain)
- Tachanka.org (International)