

Facebook Execs Are The  
World's Biggest Dick-Heads



# When the charm offensive from Facebook just turns into being offensive

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## Mark Zuckerberg testifies before the House Energy and Commerce Committee in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill April 11, 2018.

Chip Somodevilla | Getty Images

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Founder and CEO of [Facebook Mark Zuckerberg](#) was in Europe last week on what is being dubbed an "apology tour."

This was the first time Zuckerberg set ground on the continent since the Cambridge Analytica scandal broke that compromised the data of about 2.7 million nationals on the continent. This was supposed to be his opportunity to apologize to European lawmakers for allowing the social media platform to be used for malpractice and to dispel some of their concerns about its handling of user information.

Unfortunately, it didn't quite go to plan.

[The European Parliament session Tuesday](#) was mired with controversy from the outset. Originally, the testimony in Brussels was arranged as a closed-door meeting with only a select group of policymakers in attendance. This infuriated European lawmakers who insisted on a public hearing similar to the one Zuckerberg had on Capitol Hill six weeks ago. European Parliament President Antonio Tajani eventually acceded and allowed the session to be webstreamed live to the world.

## Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg speaks at VivaTech Conference

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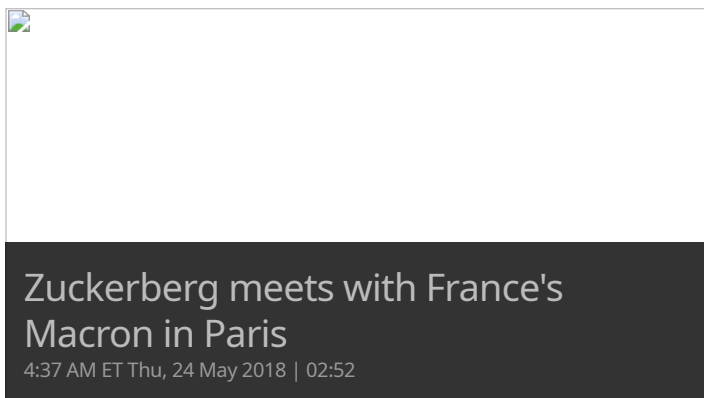
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But the troubles didn't stop there: Once the session had begun and much to everyone's bemusement, it quickly dawned on viewers that the format of the Q&A session was very unorthodox. Lawmakers went round in turns asking questions directed at Zuckerberg and it was only after a full 75 minutes of one-sided questioning that Zuckerberg had the opportunity to respond, leaving his total response time to fifteen minutes and where he clumped answers together, sticking to high level themes: what critics have called the perfect opportunity to "cherry-pick."

This riled lawmakers and the reaction from Europe has been unabashedly angry with one MEP (member of the European Parliament) complaining that he had asked Zuckerberg "six yes and no questions" and had not got one answer. The outspoken pro-European MEP Guy Verhofstadt (who was also in attendance) tweeted that the "format was inappropriate" and warned that if written answers from Facebook are not "accurately answered in detail, the EU competition authorities must be activated and legislation sharpened."

Warning shots are being fired.

One of the major concerns of the lawmakers was whether Facebook would be fully compliant with the new data privacy rules (GDPR) that came into force on May 25. Zuckerberg said that the company plans to fully comply with GDPR and that its three pillars of control, transparency and accountability are synonymous with Facebook's own thinking. However, lawmakers remain skeptical. It's unclear whether that compliance includes all users, whether any data has been transferred to outside the EU jurisdiction in anticipation and what Facebook does with the information of Facebook leavers. Selectively compliant then?



Zuckerberg also received questions on anti-trust issues, an area where Europe has become increasingly proactive in recent years. On whether Facebook is a monopoly, he responded that there are plenty of new competitors in the space with "tens of millions of users." Incidentally,

Facebook has 1.6 billion active users which puts it in a completely different stratosphere to these so-called competitors. But more relevantly, if Facebook is deemed a monopoly, then what is to stop regulators from breaking up its other businesses (i.e. WhatsApp, Instagram...)?

Taxation is another area that featured prominently. The European Commission has recently proposed a digital tax for companies whose users are based in Europe. While the tax is under discussion, the feeling from many politicians and lawmakers is that mega tech companies are not being taxed adequately given the size of their revenues. When asked about taxation in the testimony, Zuckerberg responded that "Facebook has always paid taxes in all of the countries where we have operations set up. We pay all taxes required by law and we invest heavily in Europe." This prompted one MEP from the Greens party, Terry Reintke, to quip: "We urgently need stricter regulation on taxation. EU-wide. Now"

The visibly uncomfortable Zuckerberg continued his [trip in Paris later in the week](#) where he met with French President Emmanuel Macron alongside other key figures in tech. And while he may receive a slightly less hostile welcome there, taxation is also expected to feature high on the list of topics as well.

But this is most definitely not the last time Zuckerberg will have to respond to questions on the continent. If the purpose of this tour was to stop Europe from being worried about Facebook, the exact opposite has occurred: Facebook should be worried about Europe.

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