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EU Lawmakers Back Tougher Safeguards for Media on Tech Platforms

European Parliament agrees position on Media Freedom Act
Includes restrictions on use of surveillance, spyware

By Max Ramsay

(Bloomberg) -- The European Parliament backed tougher rules on big tech regarding the removal of journalistic content as part of new proposed regulations aimed at protecting media pluralism and independence in the bloc.

Lawmakers agreed a position on the European Media Freedom Act that includes a 24-hour window for verified media outlets to appeal before their content can be taken down by large social media platforms.

Quality journalism “should not be subject to the arbitrary decisions of big platforms,” said Sabine Verheyen, a lawmaker who is one of the lead authors of the act, in the debate ahead of Tuesday’s vote.

The Digital Services Act, which came into effect earlier this year as part of the EU’s landmark tech regulations, forces social media platforms to clamp down on misinformation and objectionable content such as hate speech.

Christel Schaldemose, a lead lawmaker for the parliament on the DSA, told journalists last week that the European Media Freedom Act complements the EU’s prior tech regulations. Schaldemose said media outlets need “special treatment so it’s not up to Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg” what they publish, referring to the CEOs of X and Meta Platforms Inc.

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However, the Club de Madrid, a group of democratic former presidents and prime ministers, has warned that the restrictions on removing media content risk opening the door to misinformation by not imposing strict enough rules to differentiate legitimate media from problematic outfits.

“Maximum caution is necessary and safeguards must be clear,” Danilo Turk, a former president of Slovenia who currently heads the Club de Madrid, said in an interview. “One cannot presume good faith, one cannot presume credibility.”

The vote sets the parliament’s position for negotiations on the final text of the media law with EU member states, which are due to start later this month.

The regulation also includes safeguards against the use of surveillance and spyware on journalists, though there are exceptions under national security grounds. A group of 80 civil society and journalists’ associations have called for a total ban on the use spyware.

EU lawmakers have previously warned about the use of spyware against journalists, after scandals over its use in countries including Greece.

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