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## *EU against freedom of the press*

*The EU Parliament passes the so-called EU Media Freedom Act, thereby endangering independent media*

All that is missing is the formal OK from the member states of the European Union before the so-called EU Media Freedom Act will come into force. The European Parliament had already approved the legislation on March 13th. And with a clear majority: 464 MPs voted for the regulation, 92 against and 65 abstained. The chairwoman of the parliamentary committee for culture and education, Sabine Verheyen (CDU), spoke of a “milestone for the protection of media diversity”. Reporters Without Borders also declared that the EU was taking an “important step for the right to information.”

Because of fake news

There had been strong criticism of the project in advance. Around 400 European umbrella organizations of newspaper and magazine publishers described the law in advance as a “media freedom act” and signed an open letter in the summer. German publishers and public broadcasters had also warned Brussels. The draft regulations were slightly adjusted in the fall, but without making any substantial changes to the problematic paragraphs. As recently as December, the Federal Association of Digital Publishers and Newspaper Publishers and the Media Association of the Free Press warned: "While the press is struggling with economic, regulatory and competitive challenges, the EU is putting together a corset that does not address any of the problems and instead endangers freedom of the press. «

However, things have now become quiet on the topic. With the introduction of the regulations, a new EU body will be created. This media regulator is only independent on paper. In fact, the secretariat employees are employed by the EU Commission and can therefore be influenced by it. At the same time, the authority should be able to make recommendations against media in the name of the fight against disinformation, for example in the case of foreign financing. The focus should once again be on media that question the Western narrative, such as media from China, Russia or countries in the global south.

#### Opposite of protection

Another problem: According to the wording, the law is intended to better protect journalists from state repression and spying. But in fact it does exactly the opposite. Article four stipulates that journalistic sources and the communication of media companies and journalists must be protected, only to leave a back door the size of a barn door open a few sentences later. Accordingly, this protection does not apply if, for example, national laws allow spying and/or this is regularly reviewed by courts.

When it comes to censorship in large online platforms, the law does not live up to its name: If content is deleted, online platforms such as Facebook, X and Co. only have to inform about it within a certain period of time. Ultimately, however, they can decide for themselves which content is blocked or deleted and which is not, based on their own vague terms and conditions. Back in February, Pirate Party MP Patrick Breyer described this in an interview with jW as “scandalous and highly worrying” because company terms and conditions were given priority over freedom of the press.

#### Fear of free press

The introduction of the law shows once again the EU's weakness compared to Big Tech companies on the one hand and the fear of a free press on the other, in keeping with Napoleon Bonaparte's motto: "I fear three newspapers more than a hundred bayonets."