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EU's New Media Law a 'Democratic Victory' — But Will Governments Comply?

The European Union passed a landmark law to safeguard media freedom in 2024, but concerns are already mounting over whether some governments will follow through on its promises.

EFA President Diana Riba, described the approval of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) as “a democratic victory,” marking the first time that EU citizens are guaranteed access to “free and pluralistic information” by law.

“For the first time, Europe has a law that guarantees the public’s right to receive information that is free and diverse,” Riba MEP said. But, she warned, “the risk now is having a historic law... that is never enforced.”

Riba i Giner’s warning comes as media watchdog Liberties raises the alarm that several EU Member States are either unprepared or unwilling to implement the legislation. MEP Riba didn’t hold back in her criticism of national governments who, she says, are actively undermining media independence.

“Yes, there are governments in the EU today that have turned public media into propaganda machines, and that use spyware against journalists,” she said. “And the most cynical part is that these are the same governments that dare to speak here today about censorship!”

The Catalan MEP addressed the far-right and conservative parties for what she described as “hypocrisy” in their approach to press freedom.

“If the far right is uncomfortable with this law, it’s a sign we’re doing something right.”

She also turned her focus to Spain, criticising the conservative Partido Popular for passing laws in Galiza aimed at controlling public broadcasters, and pointing to similar actions in the region of Valencia, where the far-right Vox party governs in coalition.

“In Galiza, they pass laws to control public television,” she said. “And in València, alongside Vox, they do the same, violating a European law that they themselves approved right here in this Parliament. How can

you sign a law with one hand... and break it with the other?"

Riba MEP is now calling on the European Commission to take its role as watchdog seriously.

"What we're asking for is simple: effective oversight by the Commission."

EFA MEPs Vicent Marzà and Ana Miranda, also joined in the conversation to make their concerns heard.

Speaking specifically about the situation in València, Vicent Marzà warned the Commission that if it truly intends to implement the EMFA, it must act swiftly, particularly in Spain. "In the middle of the devastating DANA floods, the director of news at the public broadcaster was dismissed for being too critical, simply for seeking the truth," The Valencian MEP said. "This was a blatantly political decision that flies in the face of the law's requirement for editorial independence." Marzà also criticised the dismantling of internal structures meant to guarantee pluralism, saying the regional government had "abolished the very bodies designed to ensure journalistic independence" and replaced them with politically appointed figures. "This is a direct attack on press freedom and on workers' rights," he warned.

Ana Miranda, EFA MEP from Galiza, echoed these concerns, pointing to similar abuses in her country. "What we're seeing it's happening in Galiza too," she said. "Public radio and television are being manipulated, and it's the Partido Popular (EPP) that is doing it." The Galizan MEP denounced the political interference in Galician public media, claiming they were "at the service of the PP" and accused the party of violating European law. She highlighted a "lack of independence, oversight and plurality," which has triggered public complaints and even worker strikes. "We want public media that is truly pluralistic," she concluded.

Diana Riba I Giner, EFA Group President, finished her remarks with a call for unity among democratic forces across Europe, urging them to stand behind independent journalism.

"Free and pluralistic journalism must not be left to stand alone. We will need the same democratic momentum we saw in Budapest to defend press freedom, to defend democracy."

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