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### Hijab controversy roils France again

France's Senate on Tuesday approved an amendment that would extend a controversial 2004 law banning people from wearing overt religious symbols – including the Islamic veil, the Jewish kippah and large Christian crosses – to the adults accompanying children on school trips.

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### EU says Russian gas transit talks through Ukraine hit skids



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### EU strives to improve waste management



Waste is an issue that affects the whole European Union. According to the European Commission, altogether, the EU produces up to 3 billion tonnes of waste every year. On average, each of the 500 million people living in the EU throws away around half a tonne of household rubbish every year.

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# A more secure union

Brussels looks to boost its ability to crack down on online terrorist content and disinformation through more robust security measures



Dimitris Avramopoulos, EU Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, speaks during a visit to Europol in The Hague, The Netherlands.

EPA-EFE/KOEN VAN WEELE

by Zoi Didili, Alexandros Koronakis, and Nicholas Waller

Building an effective and genuine security union that enhances Europe's safety requires the bloc to tackle and destroy both terrorism and organised crime, and the lifelines that support them, by strengthening the bloc's defence systems, said Dimitris Avramopoulos, the EU's Commissioner for Migration,

Citizenship, and Home Affairs.

To respond to the collective security needs, the leaders of the EU's 28 members adopted a new strategic agenda 2019-2024 which provides the Commission guidelines for setting out the main actions needed for an effective European response to terrorism and security threats.

"This Commission made security a priority from day one. The European Agenda on Security, which I presented in 2015, has been our guiding principle and we

have been working the past years to build an effective and genuine Security Union," Avramopoulos told New Europe during an extensive conversation about the bloc's approach towards collective protective measures. "The EU had to respond to a security crisis. Since the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015, and subsequent terrorist acts in a number of other Member States, it has become painfully clear how important cross-border law enforcement collaboration is."

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# A more secure union

Brussels looks to boost its ability to crack down on online terrorist content and disinformation through more robust security measures

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The European Union's initiatives to fight against terrorism already includes information and intelligence exchanges, measures to counter radicalisation, and strategies to boost the bloc's cybersecurity. Ongoing negotiations with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as with New Zealand, are a priority on the EU's agenda. Deals with the regions would help ensure that data protection, privacy, and fundamental rights are protected.

"Since I took up my duties, we have taken decisive actions to modernise the European security framework through new legislation, reinforced operational cooperation between the Member States, and strengthened the role of our agencies to counter terrorism by closing down the space in which terrorists operate, with new rules making it harder for

them to access explosives, firearms and financing," said Avramopoulos, before adding, "We also stepped up information exchange to provide those on the frontline, police officers and border guards, with efficient access to accurate and complete data, making best use of existing information and closing gaps and blind spots"

The latest progress report about the Security Union focused on the threat of terrorist content online and called on the European Parliament and EU Council to reach an agreement on a proposed legislation from September 2018 that would see content connected to terrorist groups and cells purged from the web. The proposed measure would also enhance the EU's commitment to the Crisis Protocol, a rapid response mechanism designed to contain the viral spread of extremist content

online.

When discussing the threat that online content proposes, Avramopoulos noted that the EU "has addressed cyber and cyber-enabled threats by putting in place a new EU cybersecurity strategy and tackling disinformation to better protect our elections. Work is ongoing to strengthen the security of our digital critical infrastructure, including reinforced cooperation on the security of 5G networks across Europe."

The need for an improved information exchange between the EU security information systems also underlined the necessity for further action from online platforms in empowering consumers and the research community. The protection of 5G networks and the effective application of EU security laws across the bloc and an enhanced

cooperation with the Western Balkans are pivotal points in Europe's path towards a fully-fledged Security Union.

"We can be proud of many tangible results...but the most important is the change of our security mentality". Avramopoulos said as he summed up the EU's progress throughout the Commission headed by Jean-Claude Juncker. He noted that a genuine Security Union is possible through a "changed" mentality, but more efforts are needed to respond to the EU's collective security needs.

"While security starts at home, we would be naïve to think that it ends there – especially today when the world we live in is more connected than ever before, and criminals or terrorists cooperate across national borders...This is why we have stepped up our security

cooperation in our neighbourhood and with international partners," added Avramopoulos. "Over the last five years, we have come a very long way and have accomplished much. But more remains to be done. We live in volatile and unpredictable times and our neighbourhood is torn apart by conflicts spilling across borders. Our own citizens are becoming radicalised by terrorism and attack innocent people in our cities. Meanwhile, nationalism and populism are on the rise. Security remains a key challenge for Europe and among the number one priorities for the EU. We should continue working together in order to deepen our Security Union and create successful police cooperation frameworks which one day could become a European FBI, which remains one of my proposals for the future."

## WarnerMedia boosts presence in Latin America while distancing itself from Brazil

by Zoi Didili

WarnerMedia CEO **John Stankey** put flesh on the bones of his plans to seize momentum in pay-TV and streaming arenas through further expansion in Latin America. Stankey sees the future of cable channels fading out and expects a considerable growth in the number of hours of scripted programming that could further boost the company's future.

On October 25, an agreement to buy Ole Communications' minority stake in HBO Ole Partners was made meaning that WarnerMedia will now own 100% of all HBO, MAX, Cinemax, and HBO Go services in Spanish-speaking Latin America and the Caribbean. Critically, the deal leaves out operations in Brazil, by far South America's largest and most populous nation and the only country in the region that speaks Portuguese.

"The acquisition will allow us to bring localized versions of our upcoming U.S. streaming service HBO Max to consumers in Spanish speaking Latin America and the Caribbean," said **Gerhard Zeiler**, Chief Revenue Officer, WarnerMedia & President, WarnerMedia International Networks.

With AT&T unveiling the details



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro speaks with his Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo.

EPA-EFE//ALHAIDER

of HBO Max in the USA last week, the company is set to take the war of streaming content providers to the next level, and challenge companies like Netflix, Apple TV+, Disney, Amazon Prime and Hulu at a moment where the market is experiencing significant growth in content consumption.

### Trouble in Brazil over regulatory stagnation and haphazard politics

Though the takeover of Ole Communications stake will see WarnerMedia own 100% of all HBO, MAX, Cinemax and HBO Go services in Spanish-speaking Latin America and the Caribbean, the ownership structure of HBO Brasil Partners,

another joint venture between the companies that operates HBO in Brazil, remains unchanged.

The operations in Brazil have been excluded due to the existing regulatory uncertainty in the country. The SeAC regulation that Brazil adopted in 2011 and reformed the legal framework for audio-visual media distribution services in Brazil, established quotas for national content, and balanced the commercial relationship between content providers, TV networks and cable TV operators, and is considered to hinder competition and diversity of content in the market. Amending the SeAC regulation was a prerequisite for WarnerMedia to go forward with

the investment. WarnerMedia was said to be pursuing a clear and predictable regulatory framework that fosters growth in the industry.

"We have the option to acquire the business in Brazil but are not doing so at this time. As we have said, additional, direct investment in Brazil is not currently attractive to us because of the existing regulatory uncertainty in the country. We support and remain optimistic about the ongoing efforts to amend the SeAC law to ensure the media industry has a clear and predictable regulatory framework that fosters investment and innovation," said Zeiler.

The position of Brazil on the international scene has fluctuated wildly in recent months with its president, **Jair Bolsonaro**, continuously risking the country's formerly positive outlook. Most recently, Bolsonaro raised questions about the seriousness of his engagement in the agreement, and Mercosur itself, after rumours that his country might leave the bloc. Bolsonaro downplayed the issue, saying that Mercosur is "still ok OK for now".

Bolsonaro said on October 27 that if the policies of Argentina's new leftist president, Alberto Fernandez, affect Mercosur's agreement with the European Union, a solution may be to remove Brazil's

southern neighbour from the bloc, a sentiment that puts the entire deal at risk.

Regarding the legislative debate, the Senate and Congress are analyzing several bills intended to modernize the audiovisual legal framework. The vast majority of the proposed reforms seek to revoke the prohibition on telecommunication providers to own or control programmers/producers with headquarters in Brazil (SeAC Article 5), to eliminate restrictions on telecommunication providers to hire national artistic talent and acquire rights to broadcast events of national interest (SeAC Article 6) and to set forth that linear internet-based services (OTTs) are out of the scope of the SeAC Law. Such an active legislative agenda is clear evidence that the SeAC Law needs to be updated to keep pace with the rapidly evolving audiovisual global industry. However, several months have lapsed since the proposals were first presented in Congress and none has made significant progress. So it is clear that it is now in the hands of Brazil politicians to modernize the SeAC Law and encourage a prompt passage of the required reforms and to decide if Brazil really wants to be a Digital leader in the next years, or risk continuing with the archaic system and its market implications.