
Sky/Fox takeover consultation

1 message

Tim Gopsill <timgo@btinternet.com>
To: skyfoxmerger@culture.gov.uk

8 March 2017 at 16:39

Dear Secretary of State

I'm writing on behalf of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. We have been provided with a copy of the submission to your office from the campaign group Avaaz regarding your referral decision over the proposed merger between 21st Century Fox and Sky. We are writing to support Avaaz's submission that the bid needs to be reviewed on the grounds of the need for the owners to be "fit and proper", with an acceptable record of corporate governance, accountability and conduct.

This is an essential element in the "public interest" consideration of the buyout. Corporate governance in Murdoch media companies has been found gravely lacking in recent years. Indeed News Corporation was investigated by police agencies in both the UK and USA in 2011-13 and came close to being prosecuted, according to numerous reports.

This is not a matter that can be consigned to the past. The removal of the check provided by the other shareholders in Sky plc will make this significant UK broadcaster a wholly pliant outlet for an American broadcaster currently regarded with suspicion over its blatant political bias and dubious approach to separating reporting and comment. The spectre of Fox News has hung over the Atlantic for years. Of course this kind of output is presently alien to the UK broadcasting ecology, but no-one can be certain that this state of affairs would persist in the light of the spread of "fake news", of irresponsible populist reporting around the world, if the UK-based shareholders in Sky are removed from its board and management.

The UK should take this opportunity now to erect a permanent barrier to this kind of broadcasting by referring the bid to Ofcom and the CMA on these grounds, for the regulators to examine the dangers more closely.

We have seen the legal advice provided to Avaaz and we urge you to make a referral on this new ground which would be set out by an order under the power granted you in ss42 and 58 (3) of the Enterprise Act 2002.

We are confident you will ensure this merger is subject to the appropriate scrutiny, using all the powers open to you under the Enterprise Act.

TIM GOPSILL

Editor, Free Press

Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

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