

Belgian government bans TikTok on official phones

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The icon for the video sharing TikTok app is seen on a smartphone, on Feb. 28, 2023. Belgium is banning TikTok from government phones over worries about cybersecurity, privacy and misinformation, the country's prime minister said Friday, March 10, 2023, mirroring recent action by other authorities in Europe and the U.S. Credit: AP Photo/Matt Slocum

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo on Friday banned federal officials from using TikTok on their work phones, making his the latest country to take steps against the Chinese app.

A number of national governments in Europe have already restricted TikTok for government employees, over fears the authorities in Beijing could use the video-sharing network to access sensitive user data.

The European Union's governing institutions have also told staff in recent weeks to purge the app from smartphones and laptops used for work purposes.

"We shouldn't be naive: TikTok is a Chinese business that is currently obliged to cooperate with the Chinese intelligence services," De Croo said.

"That is the reality."

A spokesperson for TikTok said Friday: "We are disappointed at this suspension, which is based on basic misinformation about our company.

"TikTok is not a Chinese company. Our parent company is also incorporated outside of China and is majority-owned by global institutional investors."

Its user data was not stored in China, the spokesperson added.

"The Chinese Government cannot compel another sovereign nation to provide data stored in that nation's territory.

"We are readily available to meet with officials to address any concerns and set the record straight on misconceptions."

The Belgian move—in place for a preliminary six months—follows a risk assessment into potential espionage by the country's cybersecurity and intelligence agencies.

It does not cover the use of the video-sharing app on the personal phones of civil servants, ministers, or lawmakers.

Western powers, including the European Union and the United States, have been taking an increasingly tough approach to the app, which is owned by Chinese company ByteDance.

TikTok launched a new push to assuage European worries over security on Wednesday, saying it was working with a third-party European security company to oversee and check how it handles data.

TikTok says its European user data will be stored at two centres in Dublin and one in Norway from 2023 onwards.

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