TikTok finds 'partner' in Europe to offer security reassurances

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This photo shows a TikTok app logo in Tokyo on Sept. 28, 2020. In the latest salvo in the battle over the Chinese-owned video sharing app, Beijing says a ban on the use of TikTok by official European Union institutions will harm business confidence in Europe. Credit: AP Photo/Kiichiro Sato, File

TikTok has found a partner in Europe to guarantee that users' data is not

transferred to China, a company executive said on Friday, after the European Union banned the app on work devices.

The EU's main concern is over data protection as fears rise in the West over how much access the short video sharing app could give Beijing to sensitive user data from around the world.

Theo Bertram, TikTok's vice president of European public policy, said the company wanted to offer reassurances after the bloc's bans.

"There are genuine concerns that Western governments have about China and therefore as a company whose founder was Chinese.

"I think there is a higher obligation on us to demonstrate how we keep users' data secure," Bertram told AFP.

The EU's three main institutions have in the past two weeks ordered a purge of the Chinese-owned app from devices including phones and laptops used for work.

Denmark's parliament this week told MPs and all staff to remove the app from mobile devices because of the "risk of spying".

The United States has already banned the app from federal devices.

TikTok's parent company ByteDance is also under investigation by the Irish privacy regulator over whether it violated the EU's data protection law, the GDPR, with its processing of children's personal data and transfers of data to China.

TikTok is now replicating a model it has in place in the United States with Californian company Oracle, which stores the data of US users.

"All of our source code is visible by Oracle. We can't make updates without them going through," Bertram said.

The project with Oracle has cost TikTok $1.5 billion. If it is approved by US authorities, "Oracle will also ship the update (so) the next TikTok app that you get will be sent to the app store by Oracle, not by TikTok", Bertram said.

That app would also be the same one available to download in Europe, he added.

"To really convince public opinion, we need to do the same in Europe.

"We're working on three new data centres and we will work with a partner as well," he said, without naming the partner and giving more details.

TikTok has 150 million users in Europe, including 25 million in the United Kingdom. It has over a billion users worldwide.

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