

Business

Facebook suffers legal blow in EU court over hate speech

Decision a victory for EU regulators

LUXEMBOURG: Facebook on Wednesday was dealt a major blow in the EU's top court, which ruled that national courts in Europe can order online platforms to remove defamatory content worldwide.

The decision will be seen as a victory for EU regulators, who are ambitious to see US tech giants meet tightened European standards over hate speech and offensive content.

Last week, the same court decided that Google was not legally compelled to apply the EU's strict "right to be forgotten" rules globally, in a victory for the search giant.

In a closely watched judgment, the European Court of Justice said EU law "does not preclude" courts from ordering "the removal of information or to block access worldwide," a statement said.

The latest case was brought originally to an Austrian court by Greens party politician Eva Glawischnig-Piesczek, who requested the removal of Facebook posts that the judges found defamed her and could be seen by users of the social network around the world. The complaint also concerned messages from fictitious accounts, which according to the Greens, had called Glawischnig-Piesczek a "corrupt" person and which the social network refused to delete.

A higher Austrian court referred the case to

the EU's top court for an opinion and the judgment, which cannot be appealed, will now be used as a reference Europe-wide.

With the decision, Facebook and similar platforms such as Twitter, face a greater obligation to monitor their content and take down content found to be offensive or hateful, even from fake accounts.

Facebook slammed the EU court's decision, saying "it undermines the long-standing principle that one country does not have the right to impose its laws on speech on another country."

It also deplored the obligation to track down "equivalent" content that duplicates offensives or hateful language.

'Chilling effect'

"In order to get this right, national courts will have to set out very clear definitions on what 'identical' and 'equivalent' means in practice," a Facebook statement said "We hope the courts take a proportionate and measured approach, to avoid having a chilling effect on freedom of expression," it said. Glawischnig-Piesczek, the victim of the hate speech, hailed the decision as "a historic success for human rights against web giants".

"It in no way infringes freedom of opinion,"



This file photo in Nantes shows the logo of the US online social media and social networking service, Facebook. — AFP

Glawischnig-Piesczek told the Austrian news agency APA.

EU-wide rules on hate speech are limited. So far, online giants including Google's Youtube, have agreed to voluntarily take down hateful or

dangerous content, including those linked to terrorism, within 24 hours. However, the EU is expected to propose tougher Europe-wide measures including fines if Facebook and others fail to comply with orders. — AFP

German bond yields fall as US warns of tariffs on EU

LONDON: Government bond yields in safe-haven Germany fell for the first time in over a week yesterday, after the United States said it would impose tariffs on the European Union, heightening the region's recession risks.

A eurozone bond rally stalled this week — while US Treasury prices shot up and yields tumbled — as concern grew that the European Central Bank had limited room to boost growth and inflation. But as stock markets came under pressure, jittery investors turned back to safe-haven government bonds.

The United States on Wednesday said it would impose 10 percent tariffs on European-made Airbus planes and 25 percent duties on European products such as French wine as punishment for illegal EU aircraft subsidies. Ten-year bond yields across the euro area fell 3 to 4 basis points on the day. The drop accelerated after bond auctions in France and Spain. Germany's 10-year Bund yield fell to -0.58 percent, falling for the first time in over a week. It was down 3 bps, set for its biggest one-day fall in a week and a half.

"We have been surprised by the uptick in bond yields in the past week, but the trend has been for lower rates given the package from the ECB," said Benjamin Schroeder, senior rates strategist at ING, referring to the ECB decision last month to cut rates and resume asset purchases. "What has helped now from across the Atlantic was the weak data," he added. On Tuesday, the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) said its U.S. manufacturing activity index fell in September to its lowest in a decade, fuelling expectations the Federal Reserve would cut rates this month. — Reuters

South Africa, Nigeria mend relations and agree trade deals

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa and Nigeria signed 30 trade and cooperation agreements yesterday, weeks after a wave of violence against Nigerian nationals in Johannesburg and Pretoria had strained relations between Africa's top two economies.

In September, mobs armed with makeshift weapons attacked businesses and homes owned by foreigners, leading to at least 10 deaths, dozens of injuries and up to 400 arrests.

In response Nigeria repatriated around 600 of its citizens living in South Africa. Presidents Cyril Ramaphosa and Muhammadu Buhari, at the conclusion of a two-day visit by the Nigerian leader, said they regretted the violence and subsequent retaliation in Nigeria against South African businesses, pledging instead to deepen trade ties.

The local units of South African telecoms company MTN and supermarket chain Shoprite closed all stores and service centers in Nigeria after their premises were attacked by Nigerians protesting against attacks on their compatriots in South Africa. "As the government of South Africa, we have expressed our deep regret



JOHANNESBURG: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari. South Africa and Nigeria signed 30 trade and cooperation agreements yesterday.

at the attacks directed at foreign nationals and our condemnation of all forms of intolerance and acts of violence," Ramaphosa told journalists.

Ramaphosa said the two countries had sealed 32 bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding covering trade and industry, science and technology, defense, agriculture and energy.

Nigeria accounts for 64 percent of

South Africa's total trade with the West African Region and is one of its largest trading partners on the continent. Buhari said beyond the economic partnership the anti-foreigner violence had to be addressed quickly.

"We decided to take concrete measures to prevent the recurrence of such unacceptable incidents in the future," Buhari said. — Reuters