

Attorney Tries to Stop 21st Century Fox's Bid to Takeover Sky News

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The law firm representing a reporter who accused Rupert Murdoch's Fox News of peddling "fake news" has sent a lengthy letter to Ofcom in an attempt to block 21st Century Fox's bid to takeover Sky. In the message, released Monday, Wigdor LLP warned that recent actions by Fox executives "may demonstrate that there is a risk that it will act to influence political agendas in the U.K."

Ofcom is the British regulatory agency tasked with investigating and making recommendations about 21st Century Fox, Inc.'s quest to seize 100 percent control over Sky, the British media giant. Fox bid \$14.4 billion for all of Sky, of which it already owns a 39 percent stake; Ofcom ruled Fox would be a "fit and proper" owner of Sky back in June.

A separate company that Murdoch runs, News Corp, also owns the Sun, the Times and the Sunday Times.

Wigdor LLP issued the following statement Monday: "As part of Ofcom's investigation into the \$14 billion takeover, regulators met with Fox Executives, including James and Lachlan Murdoch, and Gerson Zweifach, General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer. The Fox Executives told Ofcom that Fox was fit to report the news in a nonpartisan manner and that the Company had introduced 'new corporate governance policies.'"

The statement continued: "In our complaint filed August 1, 2017 on behalf of Rod Wheeler, the allegations show that at the same time that Mr. Zweifach and the Murdochs were busy explaining that Fox had 'cleaned house,' Fox was generating a fake news story intended to influence public perception that Russian hackers were not responsible for the DNC email hacking, and that President Trump did not collude with the Russians during this election bid."

Longtime contributor Rod Wheeler filed the lawsuit against Fox News Channel last week in the Southern District of New York. Wheeler said in the legal filing that Fox News and Trump supporter Ed Butowsky sought to shift public attention away from Russia and fabricated quotes to help the narrative. The suit claims that an article by Malia Zimmerman was published to "establish that Seth Rich provided WikiLeaks with the DNC emails to shift the blame from Russia."

Rich was murdered last year in what police call a botched robbery, but multiple conspiracy theorists have said his death had something to do with WikiLeaks. The letter that Wigdor sent to Ofcom, which has been obtained by TheWrap, details examples of Fox News pushing the story, including FNC stars Steve Doocy and Sean Hannity both noting on May 16 that Russia could be cleared.

21st Century Fox did not immediately respond to TheWrap's request for comment. Fox News directed us to 21st Century Fox.

The Fox-Sky deal was cleared by the European Commission earlier this year but remains a sensitive subject after a previous attempt in 2011 was blocked by a phone hacking scandal at one of the Murdoch family's British newspapers. The scandal revealed close ties between politicians, police and the employees of the paper. This time around, Fox News is facing a series of sexual harassment allegations in addition to Wheeler's lawsuit.

Wigdor's eight-page letter details most of the class against Fox News and concludes: "Nothing suggests that Fox has altered its course."

21st Century Fox issued the following statement several weeks ago: "We welcomed the recent statement by the Secretary of State that 'Ofcom is unequivocal' regarding 21CF's genuine commitment to broadcasting standards, following advice from the independent regulator which found 'there are no broadcasting standards concerns which may justify a reference by the Secretary of State to the Competition and Markets Authority.' For over 25 years, 21CF and Sky have been proud broadcasters of good standing in the UK, a responsibility we take very seriously. We also welcomed Ofcom's decision of 29th June that Sky would remain 'fit and proper' to hold a broadcasting license after this proposed combination."