

# European privacy watchdogs probe Facebook; EU wants to 'finalise' Google market abuse probe

PARIS, FRANCE: European data protection authorities have joined forces to probe Facebook's privacy controls, a French watchdog said on Thursday, putting the popular US social media giant under fresh pressure...



Europe's watchdogs have joined forces to probe Facebook. (Image: Public Domain)

"There is concerted collective action between five European authorities, France, Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands and Spain," said Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, head of France's CNIL privacy watchdog.

She added that the Netherlands was coordinating the project, which consists of a working group involving representatives from the five countries that will look into Facebook's practices.

Falque-Pierrotin said Facebook's privacy policy was at the heart of discussions, and data protection watchdogs are likely to examine the sharing of data between different apps such as Instagram or Whatsapp, both of which belong to the US giant.

Facebook has for years been dogged by concerns over how well privacy is safeguarded online.

Earlier this month, an Austrian law graduate filed a closely watched class action suit against the social network for alleged privacy breaches.

Max Schrems and 25,000 other users are suing the social media giant for various rights violations, ranging from the "illegal"

tracking of their data under European Union law to Facebook's involvement in the PRISM surveillance programme of the US National Security Agency.

Google has also been in the firing line over privacy issues and has had multiple run-ins with authorities in Europe.

In December, for instance, Dutch privacy watchdog DPA warned Google it faced a hefty fine if it did not fix alleged breaches in data protection laws when it uses personal details for targeted advertising.

### **EU says eager to 'finalise' probe into Google market abuse**

WASHINGTON DC, US: The European Union said on Thursday it filed formal charges in an anti-trust case against Google to speedily resolve allegations that the tech titan abuses its search engine's market dominance.

EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager said Google was a "very successful" company, but that preferential use of its own shopping product in its search engine could be harmful to consumers and competitors.

Vestager announced the charges Wednesday, five years after the case was initially launched.

"What I saw when I took office was that discussions about commitments didn't seem to move forward, neither very fast nor in promising way in order to finalise the case," she told reporters in Washington.

"It was important for me to get a firsthand impression both of the complainants and of the Google company about themselves and to update the file," she added.

She said the case was an issue of urgency when she took the post as Europe's top competition watchdog in November.

"It was my option that we should move forward here instead of waiting," she said.

Vestager announced the sensitive probe Wednesday ahead of a high-profile visit to the US capital and New York this week.

She is set to discuss a roster of competition-related issues but said she is not scheduled to meet with anyone from Google.

US critics say the EU is being selective in singling out Google and other American companies, including Microsoft - the target of an investigation a decade ago - Apple, Facebook and Amazon.

The US Federal Trade Commission dropped its own probe of the company in 2013, saying it had done enough to meet complaints. But Vestager said she wants to keep politics off the table.

"I will do my best to make sure that it is not politicised, the Google case, and that it's not entangled in other issues," she said.

"I do not think that it services either consumers nor innovation if the case gets more muddy because it gets caught up in politics."

The EU has also launched a separate probe into Google's omnipresent Android mobile phone operating system, which dominates the global mobile phone market.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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