# EU sees progress in US data protection talks

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Attorney General Eric Holder (L), and EU Principal Vice-President Commissioner for Justice, Viviane Reding, participate in a meeting at the Justice Department on November 21, 2011 in Washington

The EU on Wednesday said the US had taken an "important step" in ongoing privacy protection talks by pledging new legislation to allow Europeans to sue over improper use of their personal data.

EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding said the promise of legislation by US Attorney General Eric Holder was "an important step in the right

direction."

The planned legislation, to be enacted by Congress, would permit EU citizens to seek redress in US courts if personal data released by their home countries to US agencies for law enforcement purposes are subsequently disclosed, the US Attorney General said.

"The Obama administration (will) seek to work with Congress to enact (the) legislation," Holder said in a statement.

The legislation would "fill the gap between the rights US citizens enjoy in the EU today, and the rights EU citizens do not have in the US," Reding said in a statement.

"Now the announcement should be swiftly translated into legislation so that further steps can be taken in the negotiation," she said.

Reding and Holder are in Athens for a justice and home affairs ministerial meeting under the rotating EU presidency held by Greece.

The EU and the US have been in talks since 2011 on a data protection agreement to protect personal information transferred for law enforcement purposes.

The negotiations are in a "final stage" according to Brussels.

In the EU, personal data protection is considered to be a basic right whose commercial use must be carefully controlled.

A key concern in Europe—where memories of surveillance by fascist and communist dictatorships remain alive—is the pressure Washington exerts on giant US companies to hand over personal data, including those of EU citizens, on national security grounds.

Up to now, Brussels and Washington have reconciled their differences in a voluntary 2001 'Safe Harbour' agreement meant to ensure US companies respect EU norms on commercial use of personal data.

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