Wikipedia says EU court ruling is Web 'censorship'

August 6 2014, by Rob Lever

The "Wikipedia" logo is seen on a tablet screen on December 4, 2012 in Paris

The foundation which operates the Wikipedia information website said Wednesday an EU court ruling on the right to be "forgotten" is creating "memory holes" in the Internet.

The ruling "is undermining the world's ability to freely access accurate and verifiable records about individuals and events," said Lila Tretikov,

executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation in a blog post.

Tretikov added that "the impact on Wikipedia is direct and critical."

She noted that Wikipedia had received notices that at least 50 links to its content were to be deleted.

"The decision does not mandate that search engines disclose link censorship," she said.

"We appreciate that some companies share our commitment to transparency and are providing public notice. This disclosure is essential for understanding the ruling's negative impacts on all available knowledge."

The comments are the latest to criticize the EU decision which ordered Google to remove links to information upon request from people in certain circumstances, such as if the data is outdated or inaccurate.

The European court "abandoned its responsibility to protect one of the most important and universal rights: the right to seek, receive, and impart information," Tretikov said.

Search results 'vanishing'

"As a consequence, accurate search results are vanishing in Europe with no public explanation, no real proof, no judicial review, and no appeals process. The result is an internet riddled with memory holes—places where inconvenient information simply disappears."

She said Wikipedia "will stand by its commitment to build the sum of all human knowledge through the protection of all of its sources" and will post notices "for each indefinite removal of Wikipedia search results."

British news media last month expressed concerns about the ruling, saying Google had restricted access to a BBC blog posting and several British newspaper stories.

BBC economics editor Robert Peston complained that Google had "killed this example of my journalism" after being informed that a 2007 posting about former Merrill Lynch chairman Stan O'Neal had been removed from certain searches in Europe.

The Guardian newspaper also said it had been notified that six links to its stories had been removed from search results, three of them about a 2010 controversy involving a now-retired Scottish Premier League referee.

Google said that as of July 18 it had received more than 91,000 requests to delete a combined total of 328,000 links under Europe's "right to be forgotten" ruling.

The most requests came from France and Germany, with approximately 17,500 and 16,500 respectively, according to a copy of a letter Google global privacy counsel Peter Fleischer sent to an EU data protection committee.

Another 12,000 removal requests came from Britain, 8,000 from Spain, and 7,500 from Italy. Google said that 53 percent of the links targeted were removed.

Wikipedia separately published its first "transparency report" which showed it received 56 requests for user data from July 2012 to June 2014, and provided information in 14 percent of those cases. The requests included court orders, subpoenas, informal and formal government requests.

The site said it received 304 requests to remove information, but granted none in that period.

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