

EU agrees on talks with US to begin Monday (Update)

July 5 2013, by Liudas Dapkus



European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso answer questions during a news conference of the European Commission Plenary Session in the National Art Gallery in Vilnius, Lithuania, Friday, July 5, 2013. Lithuania will take over the six month rotating presidency of the EU beginning on July 1 and running until the end of December. (AP Photo/Mindaugas Kulbis)

European Union officials on Friday said they will discuss "data protection and privacy rights" in parallel with trade talks with the United States next week.

But the head of the 28-nation bloc's executive Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, said broader concerns about U.S. intelligence activities would have to be raised by member states individually because they fall under the category of national security.

Reports last weekend that the U.S. National Security Agency bugged EU diplomatic offices in Washington and infiltrated its computer network angered European officials. Many European leaders called for the NSA's surveillance activities to be discussed in parallel with trade talks opening next week in Washington.

Lithuania, which holds the rotating EU presidency, said the process would start with a meeting on Monday.

"It will deal with data protection and privacy rights of EU citizens falling within the competence of the EU, addressing the scope and composition of future meetings," the presidency said in a statement.

Obama administration participants in the meeting will include officials from the Department of Justice and from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, a Justice Department spokesman said.

Barroso said that process was "very important to build and to enforce the confidence that is necessary also to pursue very ambitious agreements that we hope to conclude with the United States namely, in the field of trade and investment."

However, he added that "intelligence matters, those that are a matter of national security, not (falling under the purview) of the European Union, will be discussed by the member states with the United States."

The EU chief was speaking in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, which has taken over the six-month rotating presidency of the 28-member bloc

as trans-Atlantic relations have been overshadowed by claims of U.S. eavesdropping.

EU home commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom suggested that two flagship information-sharing accords with the U.S. could be suspended due to the issue.

In a letter to U.S. Homeland Security chief Janet Napolitano and Treasury Under Secretary David S. Cohen, seen by The Associated Press on Friday, Malmstrom said that "mutual trust and confidence have been seriously eroded."

The bad blood could take a toll on the Passenger Name Record program, in which Europe provides the U.S. with airline passenger information, and the Terrorist Financing Tracking Program. Both accords followed the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks in the U.S.

Malmstrom's letter, dated July 4, said, "Should we fail to demonstrate the benefits of the ... instruments for our citizens and the fact that they have been implemented in full compliance with the law, their credibility will be seriously affected and, in such a case, I will be obliged to reconsider if the conditions for their implementation are still met."

She is sending a team to Washington next week for previously scheduled meetings including a first review of the passenger accord and to finalize a joint evaluation of the tracking program to uncover terrorist financing.

© 2013 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: EU agrees on talks with US to begin Monday (Update) (2013, July 5) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-07-eu-monday.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.