

EU lawmakers push leaders on data privacy

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European Union Commissioner for Justice Viviane Reding speaks during a debate at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France, on October 9, 2013

European Union lawmakers on Tuesday urged heads of state and government to endorse a proposal for beefed-up data privacy laws ahead of a summit in Brussels later this week.

Lawmakers voted late on Monday to enshrine a new "right to erasure" in a planned EU rewrite of [privacy laws](#) fit for the Internet age and given

fresh impetus by the US spying scandal.

And on Wednesday, the Parliament in full session is set to recommend suspending United States access to EU customer bank details via a 2010 deal to share card payments data.

MEPs want stricter safeguards principally to protect Europeans from Internet giants like Google or Facebook that use their personal data, or state [intelligence services](#).

The right to erasure would mean ordinary citizens could explicitly request that companies destroy their [personal data](#) after use. Consent to use data should be given on the same explicit basis.

The Parliament's civil liberties committee voted for a hike in fines proposed for companies such as Google when rules are breached, up from one million euros to 100 million euros (\$1.4 million-\$137 million).

European Commission vice-president Viviane Reding, who has driven the issue throughout her mandate, said the Parliament "has thrown down the gauntlet -- European leaders must now rise to the challenge".

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said on Monday that President Francois Hollande was planning to raise the issue himself at the two-day summit dealing with Europe's digital future that starts on Thursday.

Fabius met with US Secretary of State John Kerry in Paris on Tuesday morning to demand an explanation after allegations that US intelligence services snooped on millions of personal phone calls made by French citizens.

The privacy rules the Parliament wants are more concerned with the transfer of data by companies to third countries, outside Europe.

"These new laws will make it harder for US companies like Google and Facebook to hand over EU citizens' data to the US authorities," said Socialist MEP Claude Moraes, who is leading a Parliament inquiry into mass electronic surveillance of citizens.

However when it comes to the use of data for law enforcement or national security purposes, MEPs continue to feel hamstrung.

"Member states are extremely reluctant to adopt any rules on data protection for police, judiciary or secret services," said Dutch Liberal MEP Sophie in't Veld.

But she said that the US revelations nonetheless demonstrated an "urgent need" to carve out hard and fast rules.

The Parliament later said all members will vote on Wednesday to "take a stand on whether the EU-US agreement on the transfer of data handled by the SWIFT payment network should be suspended following allegations of internet surveillance by US authorities".

The [data](#) is shared to help fight terrorism, but US intelligence services stand accused of tapping personal financial information from the payments exchange.

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