

Outcry over French bill giving wider access to personal data

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A general view taken at the French National Assembly during a session of questions to the government on December 11, 2013 in Paris

An association grouping web giants such as Google and Facebook on Wednesday slammed the adoption in France of a bill that gives intelligence agencies wider access to personal data without prior authorisation from a judge.

The [bill](#) itself focuses on a variety of defence issues, but concern has focused on one clause that broadens access to content such as emails, photos and other data, as part of the fight against terrorism and organised crime.

The adoption of the bill on Tuesday by France's parliament comes at a time of general concern over privacy following revelations by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden of widespread online eavesdropping by US and other [intelligence agencies](#).

"By creating access for [intelligence services](#) to all data stored by Internet hosting services and not just to technical data as was the case before, France has weakened this sector and raised many questions in terms of protection of freedoms," said ASIC, a Paris-based association that groups web players operating in France such as AOL, Facebook and Google.

"There is no doubt that this bill will weaken the French position in the European and international debate on the protection of [personal data](#)," it added.

The association has called on lawmakers opposed to the bill to take the matter to the Constitutional Council, France's top court.

The bill also allows interior, defence or finance ministry officials to request access to the data, and not an independent judge. These demands will be validated by an expert close to the Prime Minister.

According to ASIC, intelligence services were previously only allowed to obtain data from hosting services without a judge's authorisation in cases of prevention of terrorism.

Even then, the association said, access was limited to technical data that

would allow them to identify who was behind an email address or who posted a video, and not actual content.

Several other organisations have criticised the bill, which was adopted Tuesday 164 for and 146 against by the upper house Senate.

Think tank "Digital Renaissance", which also called on lawmakers to take the matter to the Constitutional Council, said the clause paves the way for "generalised and uncontrolled surveillance."

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