

EU says eager to 'finalize' probe into Google market abuse

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European competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager speaks on April 15, 2015 in Brussels as the EU formally charged Google with abusing its dominant position as Europe's top search engine

The European Union said Thursday formal charges were filed in an anti-trust case against Google to speedily resolve allegations the tech titan abuses its search engine's market dominance, and that the case could lead to further probes.

EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager said Google was a "very successful" company, but that preferential use of its own shopping product in its search engine could be harmful to consumers and competitors.

Vestager announced the charges Wednesday, five years after the case was initially launched.

"What I saw when I took office was that discussions about commitments didn't seem to move forward, neither very fast nor in promising way in order to finalize the case," she told reporters in Washington.

"It was important for me to get a firsthand impression both of the complainants and of the Google company about themselves and to update the file," she added.

She said that the EU Commission on competition could also open investigations relating to other Google tools that may unfairly edge out competitors, including its travel, flights and hotel services.

Google accounts for 90 percent of the Google search market and the concern is that competitors like TripAdvisor or Yelp could be squeezed out as a result of Google's dominance, prioritizing its own product over others in its search engine.

"If an infringement is proven, and it's on purpose... a case focused on comparison shopping service could potentially establish a broader precedent for enforcing EU competition rules in other instances of Google favoring its own services over competing services," she said.

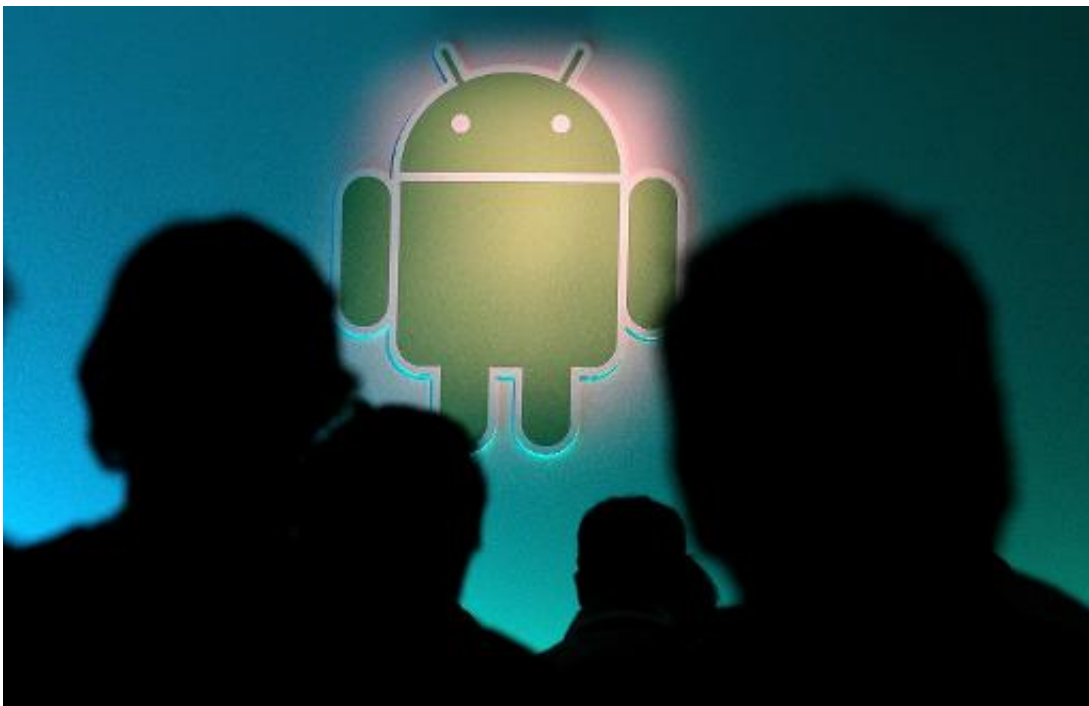
Vestager added the Google Shopping case was a top priority when she took the post as Europe's top competition watchdog in November.

"It was my option that we should move forward here instead of waiting," she said.

Vestager announced the high-profile probe ahead of a visit to the US capital and New York this week.

She is set to discuss a roster of competition-related issues on the trip, which includes meeting with officials from the US Federal Trade Commission, the Justice Department and Congress, but said she is not scheduled to meet with anyone from Google.

The California Internet company could face mega fines if found culpable—as much 10 percent of its \$66 billion in worldwide turnover last year—and has 10 weeks to respond to the charges.



The EU has also launched a separate probe into Google's omnipresent Android mobile phone operating system, which dominates the global mobile phone market

Android abuse?

Vestager said a second, separate investigation into Google's omnipresent Android software has also been launched, in order to determine whether the company requires smartphone manufacturers to pre-install Google apps and if it hinders them from developing their own services or apps.

She said the EU would work with various companies, including Google, to investigate the allegations.

"It is still way too early to give a timeline as to where our investigations will lead us or where it will end," she said.

US critics say the EU is being selective in singling out Google and other American companies, including Microsoft—the target of an investigation a decade ago—Apple, Facebook and Amazon.

The US Federal Trade Commission dropped its own probe of the company in 2013, saying it had done enough to meet complaints.

But Vestager said she wants to keep politics off the table.

"I will do my best to make sure that it is not politicized, the Google case, and that it's not entangled in other issues," she said.

"I do not think that it services either consumers nor innovation if the case gets more muddy because it gets caught up in politics."

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