

Agencies contend Facebook is breaching French privacy laws

February 9 2016, by Philippe Sotto

Two agencies contend Facebook is breaching privacy laws in France by tracking and using the personal data of more than 30 million users, as well as non-users who are browsing the Internet.

The government-linked General Direction for Competition, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control on Tuesday issued a formal notice giving Facebook two months to comply with French data protection laws or risk sanctions. The independent privacy watchdog CNIL earlier set a three-month limit ahead of eventual fines.

CNIL said that Facebook collects data about account holders' "political or religious opinions" and "sexual orientation," without informing them and compiles information on account holders to be used for targeted advertising. By failing to provide tools to prevent such use, Facebook violates users' "fundamental rights and interests," including respect for privacy, CNIL said.

The California-based company also collects data of non-Facebook users' Internet browsing without their knowledge when they visit a public Facebook page and uses the information it collects for targeted advertising, according to the statement.

The agency asked Facebook to "fairly collect data" of non-account holders and provide account holders with the means to object to compilation of data for advertising purposes, the statement said.

"This notice is not a sanction and the procedure will be publicly closed" if Facebook complies with the French data protection act, CNIL's statement said. Without compliance the matter may be referred to a special committee that decides on sanctions. CNIL's regulations call for sanctions of up to 150,000 euros (\$170,000) in such cases.

The other agency, under the Economy Ministry, accused Facebook on Tuesday of removing without consultation content or information posted by users and unilaterally changing its terms and conditions without informing users in advance.

If changes relating to those complaints are not made within two months, the social network could risk a fine of up to 15,000 euros (\$17,000) and a civil trial over allegedly illegal clauses, according to the Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control agency.

There was no immediate response to email queries to Facebook for comment.

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