

EU, US sign data protection deal (Update)

June 2 2016



From left, US Attorney General Loretta Lynch, Dutch Minister of Justice Ard van der Steur and EU Commissioner in charge of Justice, Consumers and gender equality, Vera Jourova attend the signature of an agreement on personal data protection

The European Union and the United States on Thursday signed a deal to protect personal data transferred across the Atlantic in a bid to fight crime and terrorism.

The so-called umbrella agreement signed in the Dutch city of Amsterdam follows five years of talks hobbled by European concerns about revelations of large-scale US snooping.

"It will improve cooperation between US and European law enforcement authorities when combatting serious crime and terrorism," Dutch Justice Minister Ard van der Steur said at a signing ceremony during the six-month Dutch presidency of the EU.

"It will advance the full respect for fundamental rights whenever personal data is being transferred between us," he said at the ceremony with US Attorney General Loretta Lynch.

The European parliament must still give its consent to the agreement which was signed after the United States adopted in February a prerequisite law granting EU citizens the right to judicial redress in the US.

An EU statement said the umbrella agreement covers all personal information shared between EU member states and US law enforcement authorities in a bid to prevent, investigate, detect and prosecute criminal offences, including terrorism.

The deal will not only facilitate law enforcement cooperation but guarantee the legality of data transfers, it added.

Safeguards include setting clear limits on data use and requiring agencies to seek consent before data is transferred, it said.

The talks had been bedevilled by concerns in Europe after intelligence leaker Edward Snowden in 2013 released evidence of a massive network of US spy operations on friend and foe alike, including on EU countries.

Separately in February, the EU and US struck a tentative deal on strengthening a 2001 agreement meant to ensure US companies like Google and Facebook respect EU norms on commercial use of personal data.

But the European Parliament called last month on Brussels to remove "deficiencies" from the deal designed to replaced the earlier "Safe Harbour" agreement which Europe's top court cancelled on the basis of the Snowden revelations.

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Citation: EU, US sign data protection deal (Update) (2016, June 2) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-06-eu-law.html>

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