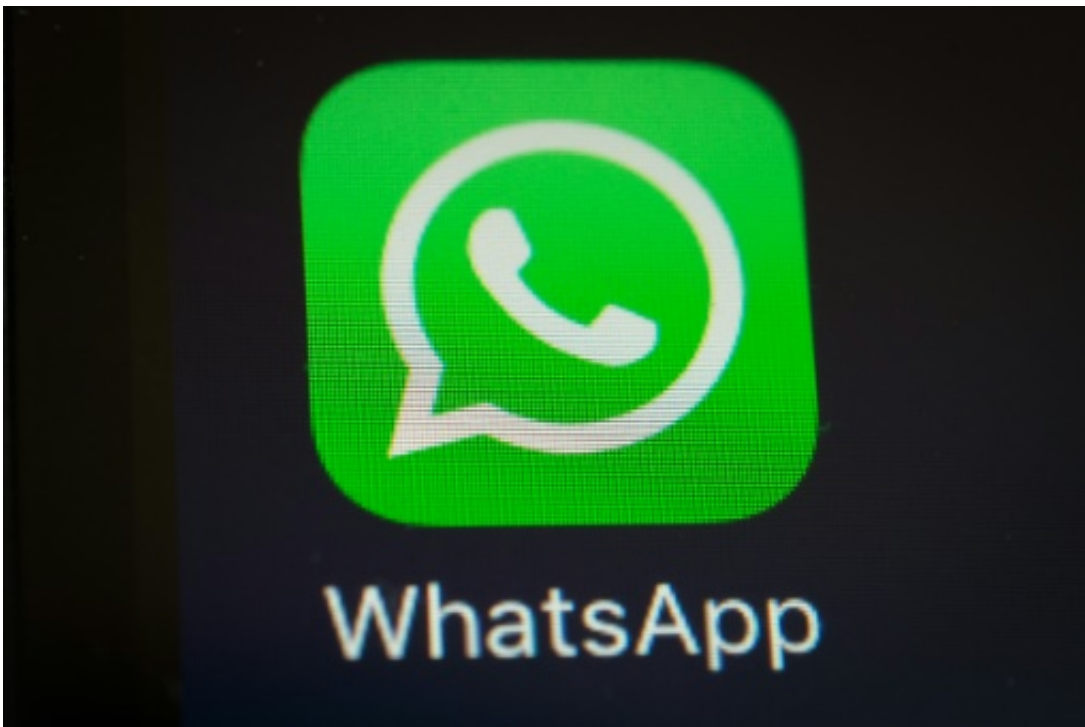


EU seeks stricter controls on WhatsApp, Skype

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The European Commission recommended tighter privacy and security for services like Facebook-owned message service WhatsApp and Microsoft's video phone portal Skype

The European Union will subject internet services like WhatsApp and Skype to similar rules that traditional telecommunications firms face, according to major reform proposals unveiled Wednesday.

In a major victory for traditional phone companies, the European Commission, the executive arm of the 28-nation bloc, recommended tighter privacy and security for services like Facebook-owned message [service](#) WhatsApp and Microsoft's video phone portal Skype.

The demand is part of a package of reforms proposed by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, which includes a promise to provide free wifi in European towns by 2020.

"We propose today to equip every European village and every city with free [wireless internet access](#) around the main centres of public life by 2020," Juncker said as he gave his annual State of the Union speech.

The plan also includes a commitment to begin converting Europe to 5G networks as early as 2018 in order to not lose ground to Asia and the United States.

The proposal gives companies that invest in 5G networks longer running licenses to operate mobile services as well as the right to block rivals except in under-served areas.

"It's a small revolution. It's no longer historic operators on one side and new entrants on the other, it's those investing in the future and the others," said Gregoire Verdeaux, head of international policy at Vodafone.

The demands on services such as Skype are unprecedented, but were underplayed by the commission.

But under the proposal, the commission would require companies like WhatsApp or Skype to offer emergency-calling services when customers dial traditional phone numbers as well as obey stricter privacy rules.

"The Commission should use this opportunity to reduce regulation in the hugely competitive market for communications services, rather than adding complexity," said James Waterworth, of the Computer & Communications Industry Association, a lobby group that represents Microsoft, Facebook and Google.

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