

Heightened debate in US as EU privacy rules take effect

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New EU privacy rules require online services such as Facebook to get consent for how personal data is accessed and shared

Amid a global scramble to comply with new EU data protections laws, the debate on privacy has intensified in the United States with some calling for similar measures for Americans, and others warning the rules

could fracture the global internet.

US tech firms, and virtually all companies with online operations, will need to comply with the rules if their sites are used in the European Union, or face hefty financial penalties.

Some American firms, including news sites like the Los Angeles Times and New York Daily News, blocked access in the EU because they were unable to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation, which took effect Friday.

Other US websites have shut down entirely, and some have hired consultants to help shut off access for any users in Europe.

Large US tech firms have pledged compliance with the EU rules, and have in many cases promised to extend the same protections worldwide.

But legal challenges filed in Europe accused Google and Facebook of failing to abide by the new law.

Why not in US?

Some US activists argue that the implementation offers an opportunity to give more privacy and data protection benefits to Americans.

"We see no reason why US companies, as they strive to comply with the new European policies, cannot extend the GDPR standard to American consumers," said Katharina Kopp of the Center for Digital Democracy, one of 28 activist groups endorsing a letter in that vein to major US and global companies.



New EU data protection rules are likely to radically change how websites use and share personal information and track users

Senator Ed Markey and three fellow lawmakers introduced a resolution this week that would call on firms to offer the same protections of the European law in the US.

"The American people are going to wonder why they are getting second-class privacy protections," said Markey.

The law establishes the key principle that individuals must explicitly grant permission for their data to be used, and give consumers a right to know who is accessing their information and what it will be used for.

Companies can be fined up to 20 million euros (\$24 million) or four percent of annual global turnover for violations.

Cumbersome, confusing

GDPR critics argue the law is confusing and cumbersome, and could lead to unintended effects on both sides of the Atlantic.

Daniel Castro of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, a Washington think tank, called GDPR "a confusing and impractical set of rules" that offers consumers little benefit.

"Instead of hiring engineers, companies are hiring privacy lawyers," Castro said in a blog post with researcher Alan McQuinn.

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