

# Germany demands privacy charter from Google, rivals

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Picture taken on March 2010 shows the camera of a street-view car, used to photograph whole streets, on the Google street-view stand at the CeBIT fair in Hanover. The German government told Google and its competitors in online map services Monday to come up with their own guidelines on data protection by December or face new regulations on the market.

The German government told Google and its competitors in online map services Monday to come up with their own guidelines on data protection by December or face new regulations on the market.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said after a meeting between German officials and Internet executives that they had one last chance to adopt voluntary measures or Berlin would draw up legislation to protect consumers.

"We need a charter guarding private geographical data and we need it drafted... by December 7," de Maiziere told reporters.

"A charter could, and I mean could, make regulation superfluous."

The companies involved did not attend the press conference.

The announcement came at the end of five hours of talks between de Maiziere, the federal justice and consumer protection ministers, data protection authorities and managers from firms specialising in online navigation services.

The German government had called the meeting following public uproar over Google's plans to roll out images from 20 German cities on its [Street View](#) online [mapping service](#).

Street View, launched in 2007, features panoramic images from more than 20 cities around the world taken at street level by a fleet of cars equipped with special cameras.

Germany is particularly sensitive to privacy concerns due to the gross abuses under the Nazi and communist regimes.

In response to the outcry, the Internet giant has made Germany the only country where tenants and owners can prevent images of their homes or businesses from being visible on Street View before they are published.

According to media reports that [Google](#) has declined to confirm or deny, hundreds of thousands of people have already opted out ahead of an October 15 deadline.

But Berlin had warned that such measures did not go far enough and threatened new legislation to allay privacy and security concerns.

De Maiziere said the industry charter should be hammered out with data protection authorities and require Internet firms to allow users to easily see how their privacy rights are affected by services provided by the company.

But he dismissed consumer advocates' calls for the industry to follow a strict "opt in" policy.

"We need geo-services for environmental policy, preventing natural disasters, searching for a home, planning our holidays -- all of that must still be possible in the future," he said.

De Maiziere said he would back legislation defining "red lines that must not be crossed" to ensure, for example, that Internet users' whereabouts are not revealed online.

But he said such a law would not affect any of the companies at the meeting based on the services they currently provide.

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