

EU's top regulator for Big Tech looks to use stronger action

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European Commissioner designate for Europe fit for the Digital Age Margrethe Vestager answers questions during her hearing at the European Parliament in Brussels, Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2019. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

The EU's powerful antitrust chief said Tuesday she's weighing up stronger measures to curb anticompetitive behavior because huge fines that she has levied on tech multinationals aren't working.

EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager didn't offer specifics on possible actions she's considering, although she downplayed the idea of breaking up companies.

Vestager is arguably the world's most powerful technology regulator. She made a name for herself by hitting Silicon Valley giants with eye-popping fines, including nearly \$10 billion in penalties for Google in three antitrust cases.

"You're right to say that fines are not doing the trick and fines are not enough because fines are for illegal behavior in the past," Vestager told European Union lawmakers.

"Some of the things we will look into are even stronger remedies for competition to pick up in these markets."

She cited the 1.49 billion-euro (\$1.7 billion) fine she gave Google this year for abusing its dominant role in online advertising. Even though the [company](#) stopped its behavior two years ago, "the market hasn't picked up - what do we do? We have to consider remedies that are more far-reaching."

Vestager was speaking at a hearing to confirm her for a second term as competition commissioner and for a new role as executive vice president responsible for making "Europe fit for the Digital Age."



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When asked about the possibility of breaking up companies, she said it "is a tool we have available." But she added that she is obliged to "use the least intrusive tool to restore fair competition."

In response to concerns that EU antitrust investigations have dragged on for years—time that critics say allows [big companies](#) to cement their [dominant position](#)—Vestager said she plans to act more quickly, including deploying "intermediate measures" to pause any anti-competitive behavior.

Her other plans include coming up with a deal on a tax to ensure global

digital companies pay "their fair share" in Europe.

"We want these taxation rules to be based on a global agreement," she said, but added if that's not possible by the end of 2020, then the EU is prepared to act alone.

The EU is trying to find a way to tax big companies that rake in big profits across the continent but pay taxes only in the EU nation where their local headquarters are based, often a low-tax haven like Luxembourg or the Netherlands.



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Vestager also outlined her plans to regulate [artificial intelligence](#) and [big data](#).

She said she'll look at how companies that have collected a lot of data can use that data "as an asset for innovation but also as a barrier for entry" to for smaller companies.

One of Vestager's goals is coming up with rules on the ethical use of artificial intelligence 100 days after the European Union's new executive Commission takes office on Nov. 1.

The EU will likely need new rules for items it already regulates that are increasingly equipped with AI. She gave as an example an AI-equipped refrigerator that can sense when it's empty and have it refilled with more food.

"How do you make sure those products are your preferred products and not someone else's preferred products?"

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