

EU inches towards big tech clampdown

October 28 2021, by Alex Pigman



The European Union is currently negotiating landmark laws that once agreed could set a new standard worldwide on how US tech giants can operate.

The European push to curb the power of big tech and radically transform the way Facebook, Apple or Google do business is gaining traction though efforts could still be derailed.

The European Union is currently negotiating landmark laws that once agreed could set a new standard worldwide on how US tech giants can operate.

The effort has picked up momentum after the revelations of Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen, who will visit Brussels next month, of the company's systemic failure to fix the harmful effects of its products, driven instead by boosting traffic and profit.

The tech giants are spending millions of euros on lobbying to influence lawmakers in the European Parliament and across the 27 member states, eager to protect their powerful profit centres such as targeted ads or big fees on app stores.

The EU has split its regulatory revolution into two laws, the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the Digital Services Act.

Slovenia, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, is working hard for the bloc's 27 member states to clinch a common position on both laws at a meeting on November 25, a spokesperson said on Thursday.

"Things are on a good way, but there are still some open questions," another diplomat said of the DMA, which could potentially give the EU the power to split up big tech companies.

The member states would then launch negotiations with the European Parliament with the view of finalising both laws to great fanfare during France's EU presidency that begins in January.

'Coming weeks'?

The biggest threat to the ambitious timeline is at parliament, where the

main political groups are still divided on major aspects of the laws.

However, key lawmakers steering the legislation through parliament insist that compromises will be found and that the urgency to rein in big tech will prevail.

They hope their position will also be sealed in time for the French presidency.

One big fight is over the DMA, which will set up a strict rulebook for the internet "gatekeepers", with Google, Facebook, Apple, Amazon and Microsoft certain to be caught in its clutches.

Its demands will be potentially game-changing: Apple could be forced to open its iPhones to rival app stores while Facebook and Google would be curbed in their tracking of users for ads—the key to billions of dollars in profit.

But the social democrats, parliaments' second biggest group, want a wider range of [tech giants](#)—like Netflix, Booking.com or Airbnb—also regulated as gatekeepers, which others oppose.

An agreement on the issue will require "some sort of compromises from all sides and so far, I think we are bringing that to the right lane," said centre right MEP Adreas Schwab, who is steering the law through parliament.

MEP Evelyne Gebhardt said she was confident negotiations "could be wrapped up in the coming weeks" even though the issue remains a red line.

Too lax

Another sensitive debate among lawmakers is who will be in charge of clamping down on the giants once the new rules are in place.

Some national authorities want to keep a strong say, but others want Brussels to have power to move quickly and hit hard anywhere in the bloc.

This is especially true for the Digital Services Act, which will police illegal content, with tech companies facing fines or worse if problems are not handled swiftly and properly.

Thierry Breton, the EU commissioner who shepherded the original proposals, told reporters that some fear a weak Brussels would allow some states to be more lax than others.

"Time is of the essence, we need to move these two pieces of legislation forward," he added.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: EU inches towards big tech clampdown (2021, October 28) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-10-eu-inches-big-tech-clampdown.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--