

Consumer groups disappointed as WhatsApp addresses EU concerns

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The European Consumer Organisation BEUC objected to a lack of clear communication by WhatsApp about a 2021 change to its terms of use and privacy policy.

Consumer organizations on Monday complained that WhatsApp's promises to be more transparent about privacy policy changes were insufficient, after the EU hailed commitments by the messaging service.

The EU began talks with WhatsApp, owned by Facebook parent Meta, after a 2021 complaint by European Consumer Organization (BEUC) about changes to its terms of use and [privacy policy](#).

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, on Monday said WhatsApp agreed to make it easier for users to reject updates when they disagree with them and to ensure it is clear about when rejecting an update would mean users can no longer use the app.

WhatsApp also promised users' [personal data](#) are not shared with third-parties or other Meta-owned companies, including Facebook, for advertising purposes.

The BEUC, which represents 46 independent consumer organizations in 32 countries, slammed the commitments as "a disappointment for consumers".

The BEUC pointed to the fact that WhatsApp's [promises](#) only apply to future changes and do not offer a solution to [users](#) who accepted the app's policy updates in 2021.

"With this weak reaction, consumer authorities are sending a very worrying signal accepting that a tech giant like WhatsApp can breach consumer rights and then get away with just a promise to do better in the future," said BEUC deputy director general Ursula Pachl.

The BEUC also said the EU did not address its complaint's main point, WhatsApp's "aggressive" practices and the lack of remedy for consumers who were under pressure.

The commission said the Consumer Protection Cooperation Network (CPC) will monitor how WhatsApp implements the commitments when making any future policy updates.

The CPC will, "where necessary, enforce compliance" including the possibility of fines.

"Consumers have a right to understand what they agree to and what that choice entails concretely, so that they can decide whether they want to continue using the platform," EU justice commissioner Didier Reynders said.

Meta did not comment on the commission's announcement.

In September 2021, Irish regulators hit WhatsApp with a 225-million-euro (\$240-million) fine for breaching EU rules on data privacy.

And in January this year, the regulators slapped a 5.5 million euro fine on WhatsApp for violating Europe's landmark General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

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