

EU will force big tech to change 'behaviour': competition chief

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Vestager appeared sanguine about competition concerns regarding the partnership between Microsoft and France's Mistral.

The EU is prepared to deploy its full arsenal to force big tech companies to change their behavior online, the bloc's competition chief said

Wednesday, the day before a sweeping new law comes into force.

In an interview with AFP, Margrethe Vestager said she did not expect full compliance right away with the milestone Digital Markets Act (DMA)—but that Brussels would not shy away from tougher action if necessary.

"If you look at our history, we have sort of made it credible that we will use the tools that we have," Vestager said.

The DMA will force six "gatekeeper" companies—Google's Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, TikTok parent ByteDance, Meta and Microsoft—to follow a list of do's and don'ts from Thursday.

European users should see a raft of changes including choice screens on their devices that offer more picks for web browsers and search engines.

"What we need right here from gatekeepers... is changing behavior," Vestager, who is also commission executive vice president, told AFP in her sunlit 12th floor office in Brussels.

The new law gives the European Commission, the EU's powerful antitrust regulator, the power to impose heavier fines, and Brussels can even break up companies.

"We will see some compliance, full compliance by some companies. But I do think that there will be non-compliance cases," Vestager conceded.

The competition commissioner pointed to a string of cases pursued against [tech companies](#) since 2014, to prove her point that Brussels means business.

Most recently, the EU executive slapped a 1.8-billion-euro (\$1.9 billion)

fine on Apple Monday for preventing users from accessing alternative music streaming subscriptions.

But, she insisted, "we're not in this in order to break up companies, we're not in this to give you a hefty fine. We're in here to push for compliance."

More 'choice'

Vestager said Brussels had at its disposal not just the new law but all the antitrust tools used in previous individual cases against companies.

"So if creativity in illegal behavior increases as well, then we have all the tools, even if the DMA would not catch it," she stressed.

The new rules were ultimately about giving users more choice, Vestager said.



In an interview with AFP, EU competition chief Margrethe Vestager admitted she did not expect all firms to immediately comply with the new law.

With all eyes on what happens after Thursday, she said one big question was how the rules would affect app stores.

Apple said its customers would be able to download rival application stores, although some app developers say the changes are too complicated to work in practice.

Apple has been one of the most vocal critics of the DMA, even legally challenging aspects of the law. ByteDance and Meta are also taking the EU to court.

Vestager would not comment on Apple's controversial changes, or on the challenges.

"The courts will decide, and that will also guide our actions for the future."

'Amazing' Europe

Beyond the DMA, the commission is casting a wide net across the digital landscape.

Also in its sights is last month's announcement that Microsoft was partnering with French startup Mistral AI with a 15-million-euro investment.

The commission said it would look into the deal as part of its investigation into agreements between large digital market players and generative AI developers.

Microsoft has poured billions into US-based OpenAI, of ChatGPT fame, which Brussels is now probing as to whether it is a disguised merger.

Vestager would not comment on the investigation but appeared sanguine about competition concerns regarding the Microsoft-Mistral partnership.

"It's much, much, much smaller" than Microsoft and OpenAI, she said.

"Of course, it's important that we are vigilant... but I think the risk of a competition concern is much lower in this situation."

Vestager is expected to leave her role after June European elections but would not be drawn on her next step.

"The strange thing is that I don't know what I'm going to do," she said. "I know for a given that I'm not done with Europe. This is an amazing place and there is still a gazillion things to do."

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