



PRISM: EU citizens' data must be properly protected against US surveillance

Committees Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs 20-06-2013 - 13:03]

The US PRISM internet surveillance case highlights the urgent need to pass legislation to protect EU citizens' personal data, most MEPs agreed in Wednesday's Civil Liberties Committee debate with Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding. MEPs also called for safeguards for personal data transferred outside the EU.

"The PRISM case was a wake-up call that shows how urgent it is to advance with a solid piece of legislation" on data protection, said Commissioner Reding in her opening remarks. Reporting back on her 14 June meeting with US Attorney General Eric Holder in Ireland, she said: "We agreed to set up a transatlantic group of experts to address concerns".

Group of experts to start work in July

"What is happening now is really shocking: (...) we cannot allow Americans to spy on EU citizens (...) even if it is a security matter", said Veronique Mathieu (EPP, FR). She also stressed the need to speed up work on the new EU data protection legislation and asked to be fully informed on the work of the above expert group.

"Are those experts known already? When are they meeting?" asked Judith Sargentini (Greens/EFA, NL). Timothy Kirkhope (ECR, UK) called for "a proper investigation" to "gather facts and details". He welcomed the use of IT tools to fight terrorism, provided it is always done in a "lawful way", and expressed support for the Commission.

Ms Reding confirmed that "not all the questions have been answered in Ireland". She stressed that EU citizens' data should have the same protection as those of US citizens and announced that the first meeting of the expert group should be held in July.

She also agreed that new data protection rules must be agreed quickly and "apply to all companies that operate in the EU", regardless of nationality or headquarters country.

Safeguarding data transferred outside the EU

"Our friends and partners go behind our backs and fish our citizens' data: this is dramatic" said Birgit Sippel (S&D, DE). "It is not true that this data is only used to fight terrorism. It is also used for immigration control", she continued, stressing that "We need to ensure that people's data are protected, whether or not they are suspected" of a crime".

"Our allies treat us not as friends but as suspects", said Sophia in't Veld (ALDE, NL). The EU needs to "show some backbone" and say where the limits are, she added.

Quizzing Ms Reding about a proposed data transfer safeguard, which would oblige third country authorities to request data through legal channels, she asked "Why between the first leaked draft and the official draft (...) was the jurisdiction deleted?" "Have Americans have been going through the draft with a red pen?"

Ms Reding replied that the red line is "never agree to go under the 1995 (data protection) directive standards". She added that the data transfer safeguard is currently just a recital

Press release

in the draft legislation, but if Parliament "wants to make it an article I have no objection".

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

In the chair: Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D, ES)

Procedure: debate

Contact

Natalia DASILVA

BXL: (+32) 2 28 44301

STR: (+33) 3 881 73661

PORT: (+32) 498 98 39 85

EMAIL: libe-press@europarl.europa.eu

TWITTER: EP_Justice

Isabel Teixeira NADKARNI

BXL: (+32) 2 28 32198

STR: (+33) 3 881 76758

PORT: (+32) 498 98 33 36

EMAIL: libe-press@europarl.europa.eu

TWITTER: EP_Justice