

Article – E-privacy: MEPs look at new rules to safeguard your personal details online

The EU could soon have new privacy rules to take account of new practices such as internet-based messaging and allow users better control of their privacy settings, especially when it comes to cookies. Parliament's civil liberties committee discussed the plans by the European Commission on 11 April. Marju Lauristin, the MEP responsible for steering the rules through Parliament, said that if companies providing communication services wanted to be trusted they needed to ensure confidentiality.

Most Europeans continue to value their privacy online. Nine out of 10 Europeans believe it is important that the confidentiality of their emails and instant messaging is guaranteed, according to a 2016 [Eurobarometer survey](#). In addition eight out of ten say it is important that tools for monitoring their online activities are only used with their permission.

The challenge is for legislation to keep up with technological developments. In January the European Commission published a [proposal](#) saying that strict EU privacy standards for electronic communications should apply not only to traditional telecoms companies, but also to new providers of communications services, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Skype and Gmail.

Under the proposed changes it would also become easier for users to accept or refuse cookies so that they don't have to click on a notice asking for cookie consent every time they visit a website. In addition protection against spam would be boosted. The idea is to adopt the new privacy rules by May 2018 when the [EU's new general data protection regulation](#) enters into force.

Parliament's civil liberties committee discussed the plans with experts during a [hearing](#) on 11 April. Estonian S&D member [Marju Lauristin](#), who will be writing a report on recommendations, welcomed the Commission's proposals, but called for stronger privacy safeguards for children active online. She intends to present her draft report to the committee in June. The plenary vote on it is expected in October.

Polish EPP member Michał Boni, who follows the file on behalf of his political group, said he was concerned about "unintended consequences" for publishers such as local online newspapers in terms of advertising, adding that the ePrivacy regulation should be consistent with the general data protection regulation.

UK ECR member Daniel Dalton, who is also following it on behalf of his political group, said he feared that if people massively opted out of cookies, it could make it difficult for companies to offer free services.

“The internet is all about advertising revenue, particularly free services, and cookies are vital for that,” he said.