

[Evil] Google Faces Antitrust Charges after EU Rejects Proposal

by Tom Fairless via shirl - The Australian *Thursday, Sep 25 2014, 1:01pm*

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Google is demonstrably biased in searches, outrageously intrusive and abusive with data, tax shirking, [corrupt](#) and outright evil in its partnerships with the [CIA and NSA](#). It is heartening to see the mainstream finally rein in this US mega-corporation on its sordid practices.



GOOGLE must improve its proposal to settle European Union concerns over its search practices or face formal antitrust charges, the bloc's competition chief said, even as he rejected calls to break up the US search giant.

In a sometimes-heated exchange with European Parliament lawmakers, Joaquín Almunia defended his agency's handling of its investigation of Google, which has yet to yield results after almost four years and three attempted settlements.

A hard-fought deal announced in February, initially backed by Mr Almunia, collapsed this month following a wave of criticism from European politicians and publishing houses. The commissioner has admitted that a final decision on the case will now fall to his successor, former Danish economy minister Margrethe Vestager, who will assume the post in November, when the commission's five-year term ends.

Ms Vestager's position on the EU's Google probe remains unclear. But in an interview this week, she stressed that fair competition in the digital economy would be "very, very high" on the incoming commission's agenda.

"We have to make sure that there is a high degree of security in relation to personal data — that there is a high degree of confidence from the people that the competition rules and regulations on market fairness are actually being enforced," she said.

The commission has been investigating allegations that Google manipulates its search results to favour its own services, such as specialised search services for hotels and restaurants or shopping, over those of rivals.

Under the February deal, which would have allowed Google to avoid fines of as much as \$US6 billion, the US company agreed to present the results of three competitors in a comparable manner. Rivals would have to bid for the space in an auction.

Mr Almunia asked Google this month to improve its settlement proposal for a fourth time. If Google fails to deliver the necessary changes, "the logical next step is to move to a statement of objections", or formal charges against the company, he said.

In a sign of the potential risks for Google, Mr Almunia drew parallels with the EU's lengthy investigation of Microsoft, which ultimately resulted in huge fines for the US company.

"Microsoft was investigated (for) 16 years, which is four times as much as the Google investigation has taken, and there are more problems with Google than there were with Microsoft," Mr Almunia said.

The decision to reopen settlement talks followed vigorous criticism from a widening range of politicians, including the economy ministers of France and Germany. The latter, Sigmar Gabriel, argued in May that a forced breakup of Google should be seriously considered because of its vast market power.

Werner Langen, a European lawmaker representing German Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU party, echoed that suggestion, drawing parallels with US efforts to break up monopolies in oil and other industries. "If we don't give them a bash we're not going to solve the problem," he said.

Morten Messerschmidt, a lawmaker with the centre-right European Conservatives and Reformists party, asked whether the commission's about-face had come "under pressure from Axel Springer", the German publisher whose chief executive, Matthias Doepfner, has publicly criticised Google's business practices.

"You've now personally backed three settlements (with Google) ... How do you justify such backtracking?" Mr Messerschmidt asked.

Mr Almunia denied he was swayed by such pressure, stressing that his decision was based on new factual evidence. He pointed to the complexity of an investigation that deals with a fast-changing market, and stressed that US regulators "came out with nothing" in their probe of Google's search practices.

The US Federal Trade Commission said last year that it wouldn't bring charges against Google after a 19-month investigation into the company's search business.

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