

Beat: News

EU's top court rules Google must respect right to be forgotten

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USPA News - Internet search engine operators such as Google may now be responsible for the removal of search results that point to personal or irrelevant data, which may appear on web pages published by third parties, Europe's top court ruled on Tuesday. The ruling came after a Spanish man challenged links to newspaper articles regarding his 1998 house repossession, which came up when his name was searched for on Google.

The court in Luxembourg sided with the man and said people have the right to request information be removed if it deemed to be "inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant." Google currently only removes results that link to pages containing certain personal information such as national identification numbers. As a result of Tuesday's ruling, Google and other search engines may now be obligated to remove information that is argued to have no public interest or is viewed to be harmful to citizens' personal rights and freedoms. "That data subject may approach the operator directly and, where the operator does not grant his request, bring the matter before the competent authorities in order to obtain, under certain conditions, the removal of that link from the list of results," the court said in its ruling. Google did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the court ruling. But Javier Ruiz, Policy Director at UK-based Open Rights Group, said the court ruling raised significant concerns. "If search engines are forced to remove links to legitimate public content, it could lead to online censorship," he said. "This case has major implications for all kind of internet intermediaries, not just search engines." Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales also expressed discontent with the ruling, stating that it affects journalism and the free flow of information on the internet. "The newspaper can continue to publish - but can't be found in Google. That's censorship of the newspaper," he said on Twitter. But Viviane Reding, the EU's Justice Commissioner, applauded the court's ruling in a post on Facebook, saying it was a "clear victory for the protection of personal data" of European citizens. "The ruling confirms the need to bring today's data protection rules from the 'digital stone age' into today's modern computing world," she said in the post. The court case once again brings to light the long debated European convention of human rights, which features Article 8 regarding the right to respect for private and family life and Article 10 regarding the freedom of expression. In 2012, the European Commission recommended a law that would give internet users the "right to be forgotten," forcing search engines to amend some searches in order to make them conform to the European directive on the protection of personal data. The British government is currently fighting against this directive, saying EU data protection legislation must secure individuals' privacy without placing constraints on business practices that harm innovation and growth.

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