

Calls to tighten Internet controls in EU

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM: The Europe Union's (EU) justice commissioner has hailed a call by German Chancellor Angela Merkel for tighter privacy controls on Internet companies amid reports of sweeping US government surveillance online.



Viviane Reding urged the leaders of the European Union's 27 other member states "to follow Merkel's leadership in data protection" and ensure the laws are revamped after the original controls were proposed 18 months ago. Reding wants the proposals finalised before European Parliament elections in May next year.

"This would be a solid basis for a strong and united voice of Europe in ongoing transatlantic negotiations," Reding said of talks with United States officials aimed at securing an eventual EU-US Free-Trade Agreement.

Reding said leaders, due to tackle problems at an October summit that are stunting the growth of a "digital single market" for half a billion EU consumers, could speed up these negotiations by resolving the privacy issue - a raw nerve for some in the EU Parliament.

Merkel, who faces a general election on 22 September, demanded on German public television last Sunday (14 July) that "Internet companies such as Facebook, Google and others inform European countries whom they are handing their data to".

Her main election challenger Peer Steinbrueck had charged that Merkel breached her oath of office in which she vowed to protect German citizens.

"Internationally, we should also negotiate an agreement," Merkel added referring to efforts to strike a balance between anti-terrorism and data protection demands.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge