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### Europe May Ban Giving False Info Online

by The Associated Press

2/26/2007 — Some European countries are proposing outlawing the use of fake information to open e-mail accounts or set up Web sites, a move intended to help terror investigations but which could face resistance on a privacy-conscious continent.

The German and Dutch governments have taken the lead on the proposals, crafting legislation that would make it illegal to provide false information to Internet service providers and require phone companies to save detailed records on customer usage.

The aim, analysts say, is to make it easier for law enforcement to access information when they investigate crimes or terrorist attacks. But Europeans have long cherished their privacy, railing against measures that would see personal information stored for commercial use or government examination.

"The people of Europe have a long record of fighting for their personal freedom, and are unlikely to accept such regulations being imposed upon them," said Graham Cluley, a senior technology consultant with the London-based consulting group Sophos.

"No one disagrees with the need to take decisive action against terrorism and organized crime, but to introduce such restrictive surveillance on the general public and Internet companies -- without proper safeguards in place -- seems positively Orwellian," he said this past week.

Look Christian, 42, who works at an Internet cafe in Berlin, said it's his business -- not the government's -- if he wants to set up an anonymous e-mail account.

"I understand that the police might want to hunt people down on the Internet, and I wish them luck, but it's not going to happen through anonymous Internet accounts," he said.

The German Justice Ministry did not return repeated phone calls seeking comment about the proposal.

The Germans and Dutch are moving well ahead of a 2009 EU deadline to implement its Data Retention directive, which calls for storing names and addresses of Internet subscribers, including those who use Web-based e-mail accounts.

Countries will be able to decide individually how long to keep the information on file, within a range of six to 24 months.

But some details of the new proposals have yet to be worked out.

For instance, most of the major Web-based e-mail providers such as Google's Gmail or Microsoft's Hotmail require nothing more than a user name and a password to set up an account. Real names and addresses are not requested.

Simon Hania, technical director of the Dutch Internet service provider XS4ALL, also

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points out that knowing who pays the bill for an ISP will not necessarily allow police to know who uses a personal e-mail account.

"For each and every e-mail address we at least know who is paying for it, which is not necessarily to say who is actually using it," he said.

*You can contact The about "Europe May Ban Giving False Info Online" at [editor@redmondmag.com](mailto:editor@redmondmag.com).*

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