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POWER PLAYERS: Meet 28 of Europe's lawmakers, activists, and lobbyists hashing out the rules on everything from driverless vehicles to net neutrality

Martin Coulter Nov 12, 2020, 11:37 AM



Courtesy of Dyann Heward-Mills; Thomas Trutschel/Photothek via Getty Images; Francis Dean/Corbis via Getty Images; Emmanuel Dunand/AFP/Getty Images; Samantha Lee/Business Insider

- **Europe has taken an aggressive stance on tech regulation, with groundbreaking privacy regulation, new rules to govern AI, and ongoing investigations into big tech firms.**
- **With Europe leading on regulation, Business Insider drew up a list of 27 of the most influential lawmakers, activists, and lobbyists roaming the hallways in Brussels.**
- **Standouts include Dutch MEP Paul Tang, Austrian digital rights activist Max Schrems, and Mozilla's head of public policy Raegan Macdonald.**

The European Union has taken an aggressive approach to regulating technology, bringing in groundbreaking privacy protections and scrutinizing major US tech firms for antitrust violations.

In the words of Microsoft president Brad Smith, legislators in Brussels have earned the title of "[most influential](#)" in the world, with even another set of stringent laws, the Digital Services Act, set to arrive in December.

Regulators have predominantly targeted the major tech platforms, arguing that they achieve dominance in one field, then unfairly capitalize on this to expand and crush the competition.

Over the past few years, the EU's executive branch, the European Commission, has taken serious action [against Google's dominance in search](#), [challenged Facebook](#) over the spread of pandemic misinformation, and – just days ago – filed antitrust charges against Amazon that [could result in a \\$28 billion fine](#).

Business Insider has listed out some of the top lawmakers, activists, and lobbyists making an impact from Brussels, including MEPs and Big Tech execs.

Check out our list below — and get in touch if we missed anyone:

Margrethe Vestager is leading Europe's mission to be 'fit for the digital age'



Thomas Trutschel/Photothek via Getty Images

Role: Executive VP of the European Commission for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age, European Commissioner for Competition

Background: Former leader of Denmark's Social Liberal Party, also served as Minister of the Economy and Interior, and Minister of Education

Policy expertise: Described as "the rich world's most powerful trustbuster", Vestager is at the forefront of Europe's battles with Big Tech. On Tuesday, [she announced](#) the EU's preliminary finding that Amazon had "illegally abused its dominant position as a marketplace" in Denmark and France, a claim the company denies.

If the EU finds against Amazon, the retail giant could be forced to cough up a maximum fine equal to 10% of its annual global revenue.

Thierry Breton was targeted by Google in a bid to stifle new regulation



Reuters

Role: European Commissioner for the Internal Market

Background: Previously a professor at Harvard Business School, former Finance Minister of France

Policy expertise: A stalwart of the French telecoms and technology industries, Breton was previously CEO of Technicolor SA (then Thomson Multimedia) before taking the same job at France

Telecom.

Breton's lead role in drafting the upcoming Digital Services Act made him a target for Google, which singled him out in a leaked document detailing the company's plans to "increase pushback" on the legislation, [according to the Financial Times](#).

Matt Brittin is head of Google's European operation



Google EMEA chief Matt Brittin. Tristan Fewings/Getty Images

Role: President of EMEA Business & Operations, Google

Background: Non-executive director at Sainsbury's, a board trustee for The Climate Group, digital director at Trinity Mirror

Policy expertise: Clocking in at 6ft 3 (or as he calls it "inconveniently tall"), Brittin towers above most of his colleagues. A University of Cambridge grad with experience at some of the UK's leading supermarkets and publishing giants, Brittin has headed up Google's European operations since a restructure in 2015.

Brittin has repeatedly been forced to defend the company's European tax practices, insisting that Google "[plays by the rules set by the politicians.](#)"

While leading the firm's UK division, he appeared in front of parliamentary select committee hearings, denying that the company tries to disguise the way in which its business operates in

order to lower its tax bill in the region. However, his defense — that Google did not make any sales in the UK, and instead these took place in Ireland (where tax rates are lower) — was met with incredulity by some MPs.

Nicola Mendelsohn is the politically well-connected face of Facebook in Europe



Nicola Mendelsohn of Facebook. REUTERS/Toby Melville

Role: VP of EMEA at Facebook

Background: Non-executive director at beverage company Diageo, director of the Women's Prize for Fiction, Chair of the Creative Industries Council, and former ad agency bigwig. She is styled Lady Mendelsohn, as her husband is a life peer.

Policy expertise: On Mendelsohn's LinkedIn, she describes herself as responsible for overseeing all of Facebook's operations in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, and leads the company's focus on "developing resources for fast-developing markets" there.

In 2016, the Facebook exec opened up about working and living with an incurable blood cancer, which she was diagnosed with in November 2016. In an [interview with London newspaper The Evening Standard](#), she described how she has changed her professional routine, cut back on her work beyond Facebook, and the impact her disease is having on her family.



Philipp von Ditfurth/Getty Images

Role: German MEP, member of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany party

Background: A lawyer by background, Voss has served on European committees focused on civil liberties, budgets, digital affairs, sports, and biodiversity.

Policy expertise: Voss is a key architect of [the European Directive in the Digital Single Market](#), a highly controversial piece of legislation that [drew criticism from Reddit and Google](#) and infamously dubbed the 'meme killer'.

Since 2020, Voss has led an EU taskforce focusing on how the EU should tackle the impacts and challenges brought on by artificial intelligence.



Handout

Role: Cofounder and CEO at data protection consultancy Heward Mills, ethics expert at European Commission

Background: Former privacy lawyer at Linklaters, former partner and data protection lead at Baker McKenzie

Policy expertise: As companies work to keep on top of their ever-growing list of data protection requirements, they will often appoint external advisors as de facto Data Protection Officers to keep up to scratch.

That's where Heward-Mills, a leading expert on European data legislation for the past 20 years, comes in. Since setting up her own firm in 2018, her team has helped rapidly growing businesses like Monzo and Neubank keep track of their legal obligations.

At the start of 2020, she was drafted in to act as an "ethics expert" on data protection for the European Commission, helping legislators to think about how they might institute "privacy by design" measures down the line.

DuckDuckGo CEO Gabriel Weinberg is calling for more antitrust action in Europe



DuckDuckGo founder & CEO Gabriel Weinberg. Washington Post via Getty Images

Role: CEO of search engine DuckDuckGo

Background: BA in physics and MA in technology policy from MIT

Policy expertise: DuckDuckGo has become a favorite among techies and privacy activists for its privacy-focused search engine. The company is a direct rival to Google, and CEO Weinberg is leading the charge among a cohort of search engine startups that are demanding the EU do more to combat Google's market dominance.

Last month DuckDuckGo, Germany's Ecosia, French firms Lilo and Qwant, and the Czech search engine Seznam [signed an open letter](#) calling on the EU to launch a fresh antitrust probe into the search engine giant.

Paul Tang has called for heavy new taxes on Big Tech



NurPhoto/Corbis via Getty Images

Role: MEP for the Netherlands, member of the Labor Party and part of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

Background: PhD in Economics from the University of Amsterdam

Policy expertise: Tang has spearheaded proposals for a "digital services tax" in his home country, and has been vocal about the need for change across the continent.

At a meeting of the Datavakbond (or "Data Labor Union") in Amsterdam, [he told activists](#): "Right now, we work for Google and Facebook producing data, and we're getting feathers and beads in exchange."

He added: "What we want ... is to get across the table from Google and Facebook to talk about reasonable compensation, or at least better working conditions."

Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth



Dursun Aydemir/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Role: European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

Background: Previously European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society

Policy expertise: Gabriel has served on multiple committees covering everything from women's rights to agricultural policy.

With regards to tech legislation, she has previously called on Big Tech to do more to fight fake news. When leading players like Google, Twitter, and Facebook signed a self-regulatory code of practice, [Gabriel warned](#) there were "still a lot of weaknesses".

Raegan MacDonald, public policy chief at Mozilla



Handout

Role: Head of public policy at Mozilla

Background: Previously policy manager for Access Now, a digital rights non-profit in Brussels

Policy expertise: A self-described "wayward Canadian", MacDonald has had a hand in the drafting of everything from GDPR to net neutrality regulations.

After joining Mozilla in 2015, she became the company's first hire to focus extensively on EU policy, and has had a hand in everything from copyright to content regulation.

Speaking to Business Insider, MacDonald outlined what a normal week might look like: "There's often conferences, even in the Zoom era I try to speak at around one per week. It's a lot of work, and a lot of social work." Asked about any direct influence she's had on particular legislation, she laughs: "A good lobbyist isn't supposed to say."

Austrian activist Max Schrems is taking the fight to Big Tech



Getty Images

Role: Cofounder of None of Your Business, a non-profit digital rights group based in Vienna

Background: Lawyer, author, and privacy activist

Policy expertise: In 2015, Schrems won a landmark legal battle against Facebook for transferring user data from Europe to the US under what was known as the "safe harbour" policy.

He filed 22 complaints against Facebook in Ireland, where the company has its European headquarters, but he received no help from the authorities for years.

Shortly after winning the case, Schrems brought a further complaint against Facebook in relation to another policy that allowed European data to be sent to the US. The consequences of a second landmark ruling in his favor earlier this year continue to be disputed.

Vera Jourova helped pass Europe's groundbreaking privacy legislation



EU Justice Commissioner Jourova holds a news conference in Brussels Thomson Reuters

Role: Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency

Background: Former Czech Minister for Regional Development

Policy expertise: A key architect of the wide-reaching GDPR legislation, Jourova was named among TIME's 100 most influential people of the year in 2019.

She is taking the lead on the upcoming European Democracy Action Plan, which is focused on tackling disinformation and holding free and fair elections in the EU. In an interview with the [Financial Times](#), she said: "Whatever we come up with will create more requirements which will mean more money, more people, more responsibility."

Prabhat Agarwal has been tasked with designing the Digital Services Act



Centre on Regulation in Europe

Role: Head of Unit, Online Platforms and eCommerce at the European Commission

Background: PhD in condensed matter physics from Cambridge, ex-senior scientist at NXP Semiconductors

Policy expertise: Since joining the EU as an assistant in 2011, Agarwal has steadily risen through the ranks to become one of the key architects of the incoming Digital Services Act.

Under drafts of the DSA, big companies like Apple and Amazon could be forced to share the data they collect with competitors, and be banned from pre-installing their own applications on their hardware.

Siada el-Ramly lobbies on digital policy



EMMANUEL DUNAND/AFP via Getty Images

Role: Director general, DOT Europe (previously EDiMA)

Background: Previously senior manager at Digital Europe, secretary general of the European Software Association

Policy expertise: Since 2000, EDiMA — recently renamed DOT Europe — says it has been "the voice of leading internet companies in Europe", a claim bolstered by its A-list membership, which includes Apple, Facebook, Google, Twitter, TikTok, and others. It lobbies on areas that directly impact its members, such as online privacy, regulation of online markets, and the removal of harmful content.

Guntram Wolff is leading the most influential think tank outside of the US



Horacio Villalobos - Corbis/Corbis via Getty Images

Role: Director of economics think tank Bruegel

Background: Previously an economist at the European Commission, led fiscal policy at the German Federal Bank

Policy expertise: Bruegel counts Google, Amazon, and Microsoft among its most influential corporate members. In the 2019 Global Go To Think Tank Reporter, the University of Pennsylvania ranked Bruegel #1 for in categories covering international economics, think tank outside the US, and think tank with "outstanding policy-oriented research programs".

Austrian privacy chief Dr Andrea Jelinek oversees data regulation across the continent



Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

Role: Head of the European Data Protection Board

Background: Former legal officer at Austria's Ministry of the Interior, head of the Austrian Data Protection Authority

Policy expertise: Dr Jelinek might be the most influential person in data protection law in all of Europe. Billed a "straight-talking regulator" by [Politico](#), Jelinek has a reputation for efficiency and precision.

"Data protection hasn't been sexy in the past," Jelinek told the site. "That's changing. Now, there is the big bang of fines and data protection that is now at the CEO level. It wasn't always at the CEO level."

Tiemo Wolken is on a mission to make Big Tech more accountable for content



Jonathan Raa/NurPhoto via Getty Images

Role: German MEP, The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, European Parliament's lead rapporteur on health technology

Background: MA in international law from the University of Hull

Policy expertise: Wolken has been a key player in the drafting of the Digital Services Act, having previously said tech companies shouldn't be the "gatekeepers" of what content does and doesn't get deleted from their platforms.

He told [The Parliament](#) magazine: "When online services are not complying with the rules, we want to make sure there is a body in place, like a European agency, that has the teeth it needs to enforce the rules, for example with fines."

Martin Selmayr was once 'the world's most powerful tech regulator'



FREDERICK FLORIN/AFP via Getty Images

Role: Former secretary general to the European Commission, former chief of staff to Jean-Claude Juncker

Background: Studied law at the University of Geneva, previously European spokesperson for Information, Society, and Media

Policy expertise: Once dubbed "[the world's most powerful tech regulator](#)", Selmayr was one of the most influential figures under former European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker.

One of the chief architects of the wide-ranging GDPR legislation, many say his departure from official duties in 2019 left a "hole in the EU machinery", according to [Bloomberg](#), but he is known to make his views known in private.

Claire Fernandez is pushing for digital human rights to be enshrined



EDRi

Role: Executive director, EDRi (European Digital Rights)

Background: Deputy director of the European Network Against Racism, Consultant on Roma rights to the Council of Europe

Policy expertise: A long-time human rights advocate, Fernandez took the reigns at EDRi in 2018, following a long stint at ENAR.

In the wake of the Christchurch massacre, video footage of which went viral on social media, she [called on tech platforms](#) to do more to counteract the spread of violent content.

She wrote: "As long as profit is made mainly from behavioral advertising revenue which increases by showing polarizing, violent or illegal content, the entire system will continue to promote such content and lead people to share it."

Gianpiero Lotito, president of the European Tech Alliance



Dino Panato/Getty Images

Role: President of the European Tech Alliance

Background: Previously a professor of multimedia publishing at the University of Milan

Policy expertise: The ETA promises to give voice to the continent's "digital champions, scale-ups, and leading startups". In a statement on the firm's website, Lotito writes: "Policymakers must understand that the digital industry has a central role in today's world and that they need to grow it like the other strategic industries of the continent, like the US and the Far East do."

"This is the only way to have a balance and to become truly competitive in Europe."

MEP Alexandra Geese has a keen eye on digital ethics in Europe



Courtesy of Alexandre Geese's office

Role: Green Party MEP

Background: Previously a translator for the European Parliament

Policy expertise: Although primarily focused on environmental issues, Geese has been outspoken on issues ranging from data protection through to digital ethics, and is a member of the special committee on artificial intelligence.

Ex-Estonian PM Andrus Ansip is among Europe's leading voices on AI and digital finance



Thomson Reuters

Role: European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society

Background: Previously the 16th Prime Minister of Estonia, ex-European Commissioner for Digital Single Market

Policy expertise: The former Estonian leader has held meetings with Google CEO Sundar Pichai and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg in recent years, discussing everything from privacy through to data protection and misinformation.

A leading figure in the EU's AI taskforce, Ansip previously said the bloc intended to [spend around \\$24 billion](#) on the technology by the end of the decade.

Karen Melchior has been named one of the EU's next 'digital champions'



Karen Melchior

Role: MEP, member of the Renew Europe Group

Background: Law degree from the University of Copenhagen

Policy expertise: A lawyer by background, Melchior went from winning a seat on the Copenhagen Municipal Council in 2017 to the European Parliament in less than two years. She is a member of the special committee on AI, and was dubbed one of the EU's "next digital champions" by [Access Partnership](#).

Paul Hofheinz is an ex-Wall Street Journal reporter lobbying for tech reform



Lisbon Council

Role: President and cofounder of the Lisbon Council

Background: Previously a reporter for the Wall Street Journal in Europe, has an MSc in the government and politics of Russia from LSE

Policy expertise: Founded in 2003, the Lisbon Council bills itself as "an independent, non-partisan think tank" based in Brussels. The organization counts Google and Apple among its leading members.

Cybersecurity is a top priority for Dutch MEP Caroline Nagtegaal



Caroline Nagtegaal

Role: MEP, Renew Europe

Background: Previously a public affairs manager for travel firm Schipol, and public sector advisor to KPMG

Policy expertise: With an extensive background in travel and international borders, Nagtegaal proved her ability while serving on the EU's committee on transport and tourism. In 2019, she co-authored a resolution on the cybersecurity risks posed by trade with China.

MEP Manuel Bompard still works at a machine learning startup



ERIC PIERMONT/AFP via Getty Images

Role: French MEP

Background: Associate of failed left-wing presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon

Policy expertise: An engineer by background, Bompard has vowed to look at industry issues in his role with the EU, with his French political party advocating for the transparency of AI algorithms and the localization of Europeans' personal data within the EU.

As of 2019, he was still working at French machine learning startup [ADAGOS](#).

Birgit Sippel is laser-focused on ePrivacy



Thierry Tronnel/Corbis via Getty Images

Role: German MEP, The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

Policy expertise: Previously the rapporteur on the EU's ePrivacy and e-Evidence files, Sippel has been highlighted as a key "digital champion" of the EU to watch out for in the future, with an interest in internet policy.

Katarina Barley has a keen eye on competition law



Philipp von Ditfurth/picture alliance via Getty Images

Role: Fourth VP of the European Parliament

Background: Previously a senior cabinet minister under Angela Merkel's German administration

Policy expertise: Since joining Germany's Social Democratic Party in 1994, Barley has gone on to establish herself as one of the leading figures in European policy circles. Singled out by [Access Partnership](#) as a future "digital champion" of Europe, her key interests lie in data protection and competition legislation.