

U.S. Sites Hacked As Objections Grow To Piracy Deal

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LONDON (AP) — Opponents of a controversial global copyright treaty counted three victories Friday as American government websites were hacked and the Eastern European nations of Poland and Slovenia distanced themselves from the deal.

Sites belonging to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and the National Consumer Protection Week were vandalized by Anonymous, a loose collection of cyber rebels who have helped lead the charge against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, or ACTA.

The hackers replaced the sites with profanity-laced statements and a violent German-language video satirizing the treaty.

At the same time, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Friday the country was abandoning plans to ratify the deal. He said he now sees his earlier support for ACTA as a mistake. "I was wrong," he said at a news conference.

His announcement came after Slovenia's government also said Friday that it is halting the ratification of ACTA.

"This agreement is obviously not a matter of understanding, but of major misunderstanding," Slovenian Education Minister Radovan Zerjav said.

The developments are bad news for industrialized countries such as the United States, which have pushed ACTA as a way of defending the entertainment industry and luxury goods manufacturers from pirates and counterfeiters. American officials spent years negotiating ACTA in an effort to harmonize intellectual property protection across different countries.

The goal is to help countries fight everything from fake pharmaceuticals to pirated music, but grass-roots activists — many of them in Eastern Europe — have been waging weeks of protests against what they see as moves intended to clamp down on free expression and Internet privacy.

So far around 20 countries have signed up to the deal, a key step before ratification. Four EU countries have now backed away from it — Poland, Slovenia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic — and its approval at the European Union level appears increasingly uncertain.

Tusk also said Friday that he sent a letter to the European People's Party, a center-right group in the European Parliament to which his Civic Platform belongs, urging it not to back ACTA in its current form.

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Back in the United States, the Trade Commission confirmed that the sites had been compromised, saying in an email that they had been taken down and wouldn't be brought back "until we're satisfied that any vulnerability has been addressed."

Anonymous boasted of stealing a large amount of personal data from Trade Commission employees — including everything from banking statements to dating website information.

The Trade Commission said that while it was still investigating the hack, "the nature of the site limits information that could have been accessed."

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