

PRESS RELEASE

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CALL FOR TRUSTWORTHY INSTANT MESSAGING

To allow citizens and companies to benefit from digital solutions (including instant messaging solutions) that respect one's right to data privacy and are in line with the highest moral and legal principles, is one of European democratic societies' major challenge. To counter the limits currently set by the major players in this field, an alternative communication solution that will offer the highest level of security and trust, based on open standards and under the national and European legal frame, should be considered.

With the digitalisation of our societies, which has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, instant messaging solutions make daily communications a lot easier. These communication tools thus prove to be very convenient, if not unavoidable. However, the control of one's personal data on the main platforms in use remains weak and limited.

On 4 January 2021, the announcement of the evolution of WhatsApp's terms and conditions had a major impact and numerous users shifted to alternative solutions.

While other suppliers are available on the market, the major players run monolithic services, forcing users to depend on a single company and thus, to its own Terms & Conditions (most of the time communicated through non-transparent means).

Legal instruments have been put in place, both at national and European levels, in order to establish a framework for personal data protection (i.e. the implementation of the GDPR policy). Thus, this practice remains unsatisfactory. The underlying issues with the current landscape of instant messaging cannot be ignored and call for a strategy of change.

By gathering Luxembourg's Digital players and calling on private companies, public organisations and citizens to support the movement, the objective is to enable the development of a national alternative instant messaging solution, which will deliver the following guarantees:

- to offer the highest level of security and trust,
- not to rely on a single entity and to operate a decentralised and federated architecture,
- to be based on open standards,
- to be able to run in EU based datacentres and under EU legal regimes,
- to be able to secure national communications within Luxembourg based datacentres and under Luxembourg legal framework.

To read the related Position Paper “Trustworthy Instant Messaging” and support the movement: <https://trustworthy.messaging.lu/>

Attached to the Press Release: Position Paper “Trustworthy Instant Messaging” (PDF), including the up-to-date list of supporters.

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Position Paper

Raising awareness about the usage of our personal data by using instant messaging apps and calling for a communication solution respecting GDPR and high security standards that enforce and protect European values and rights.

Early January, the very successful messaging application WhatsApp announced a change in its terms of usage, that allow, among the others, a further usage of personal data by its parent company, Facebook. These changes leave the WhatsApp users only the choice between allowing Facebook to reuse personal data or stop using the service and lose access to an admittedly convenient communication platform.

While the outcry triggered by Facebook's move has been significant, and people are flocking to alternative providers, the underlying issues with the current landscape of instant messaging needs to be highlighted - as well as a strategy for a change explored.

It is undeniable that instant messaging is a critical tool for quick and efficient communications, ranging from a purely personal text up to highly sensitive professional exchanges. While different application providers and alternatives to WhatsApp do exist, all the well-known big players are running monolithic services and thus users are subject to the persistence of a single company and the evolution of its own T&C. These T&C are in fact, most of the time imposed on users as an opt out and communicated through non-transparent and non-user-friendly means.

This reality is highly unsatisfactory, considering also the fact that, although important national or EU-wide legal instruments (e.g. the GDPR) were put into place in the last years, personal data of EU residents might be transferred to third countries and leave the scope of a data protection regime. After the invalidation of the Privacy Shield by the Court of Justice and the multiple privacy-related issues that Facebook faced in the last years - that it was not able to address convincingly - it has become essential for all European countries to rely on and provide to its enterprises and citizens access to messaging solutions that respect everyone's right to data privacy, in line with the highest moral and legal principles of every European democratic society.

Luxembourg and the next steps...

In order to move towards to a future solution that does cater for the essential needs that a trustworthy communication platform provides, we encourage and support the deployment of an instant messaging platform delivering the following guarantees:

- to offer the highest level of security and trust,
- not to rely on a single entity and to operate a decentralised and federated architecture,
- to be based on open standards,
- to be able to run in EU based datacentres and under EU legal regimes,
- to be able to secure national communications within Luxembourg based datacentres and under Luxembourg legal framework.

A standard defining a secure, decentralised and federated communication protocol does exist and has been put into production by several European countries. Supported by multiple open-source as well as vendor driven deployments, this standard implements all aforementioned requirements, rights and values.

France, Germany and the UK, are already using applications based on the open and interoperable matrix standard. Building on these examples we call on every company, each individual, and all public entities, to join the effort to save and protect the right to privacy and other fundamental rights of individuals, put at risk by the widespread use of all these communication apps. All citizens shall be able to exercise the right to control their own data.

Contact: trustworthy@messaging.lu

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Access the updated list of supporters here: <https://trustworthy.messaging.lu>