

Facebook chief faces EU grilling over his political manipulation tool 'digital monster'



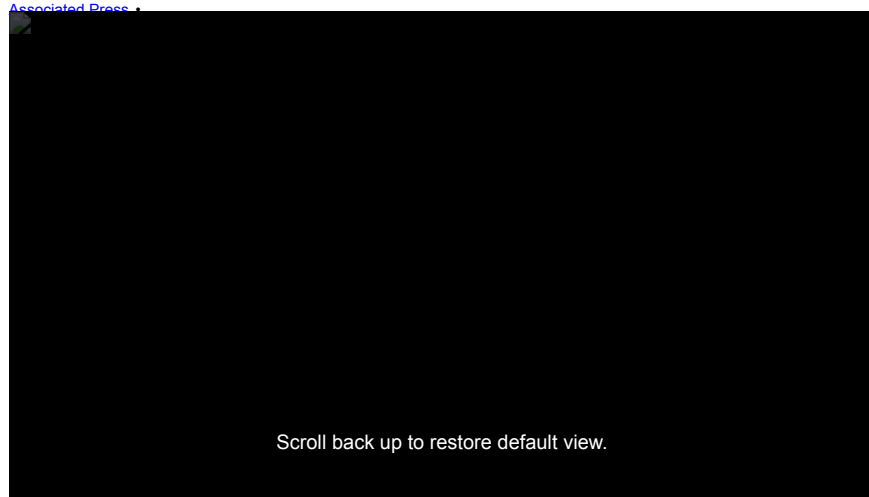
European lawmakers leave fuming as Zuckerberg gives broad answers (news.alphastreet.com)

by jammybritton27 to news (+7|-0)

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Associated Press

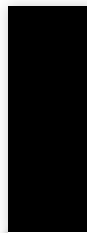
LORNE COOK ,



BRUSSELS (AP) — Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg faced tough questions from European Union lawmakers Tuesday over what one of them branded Zuckerberg's "digital monster," and he apologized for the way the social network has been used to produce fake news, interfere in elections and sweep up people's personal data.

At a hearing in the European Parliament in Brussels, legislators sought explanations about the growing number of false Facebook accounts and whether Facebook will comply with new EU privacy rules, but many were left frustrated by Zuckerberg's lack of answers.

After short opening remarks, Zuckerberg listened to all the questions first, and then responded to them all at once. There was no back-and-forth with lawmakers, as happened



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during his testimony in front of the U.S. Congress last month.

As a result, he was able to avoid giving some answers and ran out of time to provide others.

His appearance came at a difficult time for Facebook. In March it was alleged that political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica used the data of millions of Facebook users to target voters during political campaigns, including the one that brought Donald Trump to the presidency.

Whether it was "fake news, foreign interference in elections and developers misusing people's information," Zuckerberg said, "we didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibilities."

"That was a mistake, and I'm sorry for it," he added during the hearing, which ran just over an hour and a half.

But liberal leader Guy Verhofstadt said Zuckerberg has done enough apologizing for his company's mistakes. He said the real question is: "Are you capable to fix it?"

Verhofstadt asked whether Zuckerberg wanted to be remembered like computer legends Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, "who have enriched our world and our societies," or as "a genius who created a digital monster that is destroying our democracies and our societies."

Socialist leader Udo Bullmann demanded an explanation for how the number of false Facebook accounts can be on the rise and what is being done to stop them being used to manipulate elections.

"We are at the crossroads, and in a critical situation, because your business practices touch upon two basic values of our societies," Bullmann said. "First of all, the personal data

which became perhaps the most important asset in modern media society. And secondly, on the right of self-government of sovereign nations."

Zuckerberg said Facebook is strengthening cooperation with national election authorities and trying to introduce more transparency about who is running political advertising.

"This is one of our top priorities as a company," he told the lawmakers. He said the goal is to build more artificial-intelligence tools to identify fake accounts and to take them down.

Facebook came away largely unscathed from Zuckerberg's testimony in front of Congress in April. The company's stock even rose after his appearance. Several U.S. lawmakers often seemed to fail to grasp the technical details of Facebook's operations.

European politicians in general have been tougher on Silicon Valley and have attached more importance to online privacy.

Zuckerberg's testimony in Brussels came just before a stringent new EU law, known as the General Data Protection Regulation, or GDPR, takes effect.

The law, which goes into force on Friday, is tougher than U.S. legislation and will give Facebook's estimated 252 million European users more control over what companies can do with what they post, search and click on, regardless of what country those companies operate in. Companies could be fined up to 4 percent of their worldwide annual revenue for violations.

Asked whether Facebook is ready to respect the rules, Zuckerberg said: "We do expect to be fully compliant" on Friday.

The evening hearing was initially meant to be held behind closed doors but was broadcast live after many in the assembly demanded an open session.

As time ran out, Zuckerberg agreed to provide written answers to questions he had not responded to during the hearing.

Lamenting the way the hearing was organized and the lack of solid answers, Conservative leader Sayed Kamall said, "Unfortunately the format was a get-out-of-jail-free card."

"We still don't know the depths that people's data has been abused," he said. "Until we genuinely know what has happened, and is still happening, Facebook and legislators can't put in place the right solutions to prevent the same issues in the future."

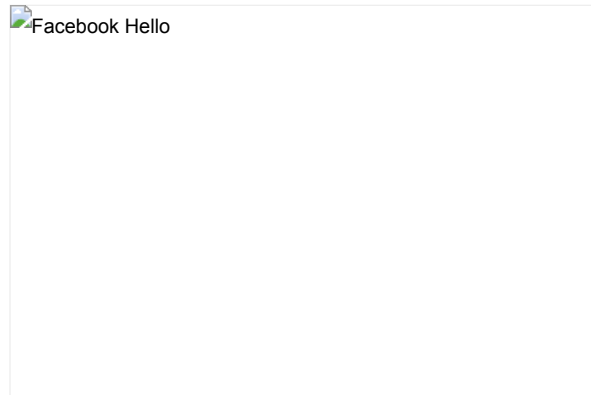
Zuckerberg is due to hold talks in Paris on Wednesday with French President Emmanuel Macron.

'Facebook takes data from my phone – but I don't have an account!'

Reg reader finds mobile apps can't be cut or quieted

By [Shaun Nichols in San Francisco](#) 140  [Reg comments](#)

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Anyone who uses the Facebook phone app knows what a toll it can take both on your mobile data and free time to be plugged into the social network through your device.

But what happens if you don't even have an account, you can't remove the app, and the social network won't leave you alone?

That's a problem facing folks around the world. One *Register* reader told us this week the Facebook apps on his Sprint LG handset are transmitting mysterious information in the background back to Facebook's servers, even though he doesn't have an account with the social network, isn't therefore logged in, and has repeatedly tried to turn off background data.

And the software cannot be removed without, presumably, unlocking or rooting the device.

The image shows the Facebook logo, which consists of the word "Facebook" in its characteristic red font, preceded by a small green and white icon.


"Since these are system apps, they can't be uninstalled. I can't even disable many of them," our reader, who wished to remain anonymous, said.

"When I uninstall updates on these apps and disable their access to use data in the background, within minutes they have all somehow turned their ability to use background data back on and have reinstalled all the updates that I manually uninstalled."

Facebook does [offer instructions](#) on how to disable updates for Android phones, though our tipster noted that, on his handset, that option is grayed out.

**Facebook
Android app
caught
seeking
'superuser'
clearance**

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 Screenshot of a disabled disable button on Android

Disable... is disabled

Our reader told us that not only has he never used the three apps in question (Facebook, Facebook App Installer, and Facebook App Manager) on the handheld, he has never used Facebook, full stop.

"I don't have, and have never had, a Facebook account," the tipster said.

"But the behavior of these apps and the way they insist on using background data tells me that they are almost certainly collecting my data anyway."

It's hard to fault our reader for feeling this way. Who knows what the software is collecting and sending back to base? It isn't particularly clear.

The social network has not exactly covered itself in glory as of late when it comes to data privacy. Following the revelations of data harvesting by [Cambridge Analytica](#) that encompassed tens of millions of peoples' profiles, Facebook said it has had to suspend [around 200 other apps](#) that were possibly violating user privacy.

More recently, Facebook's mobile app [alarmed Android users](#) when without warning it began asking for root-level access on their devices. The Silicon Valley giant said this was the result of a programming blunder by its engineers, and that it had no real desire to get superuser clearance.

Why, then is the Facebook app trying to send and receive data on the handsets of people who don't even use the service? Facebook insisted to *The Register* that no personal info is being trafficked, only things like the operating system version and device type that Facebook uses to keep the app updated.

Even if you want to give the website the benefit of the doubt, that it isn't covertly spying on you and is merely vacuuming up details of your device, it's jolly rude this mild snooping can't be completely disabled. As always, US tech corp thinks it knows best.

Now comes the bad news: that app is going to get and stay updated whether you like it or not. A Facebook spokesperson told us the following:

We have partnered with mobile operators and device manufacturers to pre-install Facebook apps on Android devices to help people have the best experience on Facebook right out of the box and during the life of the device. By having Facebook

apps pre-installed, we ensure people have the latest version of the application installed on their device, giving them access to bug fixes, critical security enhancements, and other new product features.

So there you have it, dear reader. If Facebook is glued into your Android phone, it will stay there, pinging Facebook, and you don't even have to use it. In fact, you don't even have to create a profile. But the data must flow. ®