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## **AUSTRIA PLANS TO FORCE SOCIAL MEDIA TO IDENTIFY USERS AS BAR TO HATE SPEECH**

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Austrias right-wing government plans to force large social and traditional media to verify their users identity so that individuals can be tracked down if they post hate speech online anonymously, it said on Wednesday.

The measure, part of a bill that has yet to be submitted to parliament, will apply only to larger platforms, defined as those with have more than 100,000 users or ████████ in revenue in Austria, as well as traditional media receiving a certain amount in government subsidies.

Culture and media minister Gernot Bluemel said the bill, which he expects to come into force in September next year, was the first of its kind in the European Union. Other countries in the bloc, including Germany and France, have taken steps to rein in hate speech online.

Forums covered by the bill would have to conduct an authentication of their users, Bluemel told a news conference after a cabinet meeting.

That means that if someone wants to post something in these forums, they will have to go through a registration process that at the end of the day must mean that if a court asks Who is this person?, it is possible to tell who they are, he added.

Germany has passed legislation under which fines of up to ███ million can be imposed on sites that fail to remove hate speech promptly, though that has sparked concerns that Twitter , Facebook and other social media could block more content than necessary.

France said in November that Facebook would allow French regulators to embed inside the company to examine how it combats online hate speech, the first time the wary tech giant has opened its doors in such a way.

Facebook, Twitter and Googles YouTube also recently accelerated removals of online hate speech in the face of a potential European Union crackdown.

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