

By reaching a settlement with Google over how the company seeks consent to use customer data, Italy's competition watchdog has underscored an important reality of Europe's digital rulebook: even in an era dominated by Brussels-led regulation, national authorities continue to wield significant influence over how Big Tech is policed.

The agreement, announced by the Italian Competition and Consumer Protection Authority, obliges the U.S. technology giant to overhaul the way it presents data-sharing choices to users. At the heart of the case was an investigation into Google's consent screens, which Italy accused of steering people toward linking services such as Maps and Search through practices deemed misleading and overly aggressive under national consumer law.

Although the conduct under scrutiny also falls within the scope of the EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA) — a flagship law intended to centralize oversight of dominant online platforms — Rome pressed ahead with its own probe. The result is a clear sign that the DMA has not sidelined domestic regulators, despite its ambition to create a harmonized and streamlined enforcement system across the bloc.

A coordinated but assertive approach

The European Commission welcomed the Italian settlement and confirmed that the changes agreed with Google would extend beyond Italy to users across the European Union. According to Commission officials, the redesigned consent screens will provide more transparent information about how personal data is combined and reused across Google's services, as well as clearer explanations of what agreeing to such practices actually means for individuals.

Brussels framed the episode as an example of healthy cooperation rather than regulatory overlap. A spokesperson said the intervention by Italy demonstrated how national consumer protection enforcement can complement the Commission's role under the DMA, ultimately

delivering stronger protections for users.

Google, for its part, said it would redesign its interfaces and prompt Italian users to revisit their data preferences. While the immediate action is focused on Italy, the broader interface changes will affect users throughout Europe, reflecting the cross-border impact of national enforcement decisions.

Tension over who sets the pace

The case has unfolded against a backdrop of growing unease — particularly from across the Atlantic — over Europe's increasingly strict digital regime. The DMA, which principally targets the world's largest platform companies, has drawn criticism in Washington for disproportionately affecting American firms.

During a visit to Brussels, U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick urged the EU to ease its regulatory pressure. He expressed concern that the current framework stifles innovation and hinted at potential trade-offs, suggesting cooperation in sectors like steel could be on the table if Europe softened its approach to tech regulation.

This criticism echoes a broader sentiment within parts of the U.S. government and industry that the DMA constitutes an unfair and targeted control mechanism aimed closely at Silicon Valley heavyweights.

Google's broader legal challenges

The Italian settlement lands at a time when Google is already grappling with major legal setbacks in Europe. Just weeks ago, the company was hit with an antitrust fine approaching €3 billion for abusing its dominant position in online advertising markets. EU authorities found

that Google had unfairly disadvantaged its advertising customers, squeezing competition and consolidating its influence over digital ad services.

In response, Google has proposed a series of operational tweaks to its advertising model, though it has firmly rejected demands to break up parts of its business — a move some critics argue would be the only truly effective remedy.

Consumer groups, meanwhile, remain unconvinced by Google's concessions on data consent. Organisations such as BEUC have voiced concern that the company's revised screens may still fall short of genuine clarity and could continue to nudge users toward accepting broad data-sharing practices. In the absence of a strong, explicit stance from the European Commission on Google's DMA compliance in this area, Italy stepped into the breach.

Fears of a fragmented rulebook

Some industry representatives worry that a more active role for national authorities risks undermining the DMA's core purpose: the creation of a consistent, EU-wide regulatory environment. They argue that parallel enforcement actions could result in a fragmented patchwork of interpretations and obligations, placing additional burdens on companies operating across multiple member states.

Google itself sought to block Italy's intervention by claiming that, as a designated "gatekeeper" under the DMA, it should fall under the exclusive oversight of the European Commission. Italy rejected this position, citing legal precedent that supports the application of national consumer protection rules even in areas also covered by EU-wide legislation.

Italian regulators stressed that they had worked closely with Brussels throughout the investigation, engaging in joint discussions on remedies and ensuring alignment with broader EU policy objectives. The case was launched in 2024, shortly after the DMA came into force,

reflecting the determination of national bodies to remain active players in shaping the digital regulatory landscape.

A pattern of national action

Italy's move is not without precedent. Prior to the DMA's implementation, Germany's competition authority intervened against Google over its data use policies under national digital competition laws. That action ultimately led to Europe-wide adjustments, extending stricter data rules beyond flagship services like Search to others such as Gmail.

Together, these cases highlight a dynamic in which national regulators continue to shape outcomes even as Brussels assumes the formal role of chief enforcer. Instead of erasing national influence, the DMA appears to be operating alongside it, creating a layered system where both levels contribute to defining the boundaries of acceptable behavior for Big Tech firms.

For users, this could mean clearer choices, improved transparency and stronger protections. For technology companies, however, it signals that Europe's regulatory environment remains complex — and that scrutiny may come not only from Brussels, but from every corner of the continent.