

Is there a 'right to be forgotten'?

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As has been widely reported the European Court of Justice ruled against Google yesterday, saying a Spanish man had the right to have links to certain events in his past removed from its search engine results. As [the Guardian report notes](#):

The European judges made clear that in their view the EU data protection directive already established a "right to be forgotten".

The judges said they had found that the inclusion of links in the Google results related to an individual who wanted them removed "on the grounds that he wishes the information appearing on those pages relating to him personally to be 'forgotten' after a certain time" was incompatible with the existing data protection law.

They said the data that had to be erased could "appear to be inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant or excessive ... in the light of the time that had elapsed". They added that even accurate data that had been lawfully published initially could "in the course of time become incompatible with the directive".

I find this very worrying indeed. I suspect everyone has done something they'd rather forget and some of it will be mentioned on the web, but when the web is becoming the main, and even sole, archive of choice this is not just a 'right to be forgotten', it represents the editing of history and a right to be unaccountable. Neither can be acceptable in a liberal democracy.

The ethical issues [are well considered in the FT](#) (and 30 articles a month can be read, free).

For once I stand beside the UK government on this one: I do not think there is a right to be forgotten.