

EU copyright reform must consider rights of public, say MEPs

Written by Desmond Hinton-Beales on 17 June 2015 in News
News

The European parliament's legal affairs committee has voted through a report calling for the protection of cultural diversity and balance between users and rightholders in the planned EU copyright reform.



The vote on Tuesday, which came after a series of delays and more than 500 amendments, was guided through committee by Greens / European Free Alliance (EFA) and Pirate party MEP Julia Reda.

Following the vote, Reda said, "This report recognises that copyright reform is necessary not just to improve the digital single market but also to promote all EU citizens' access to knowledge and information in the EU.

"The report calls on the European commission to consider a wide variety of measures to bring copyright law up to speed with changing realities and improve cross-border access to our cultural diversity."

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MEPs urged the commission to improve cross-border access to services. Parliamentarians say that geoblocking - the denial of access to content based on geographical criteria - is preventing EU cultural minorities from accessing content or services in their own language.

The parliament, however, also underlined the need for territorial licenses to ensure member states receive fair remuneration for the financing of content production, particularly for the audiovisual and film sectors.

"This report marks a turning point," stressed Reda. "After decades in which the focus was on introducing new restrictions to protect the material interests of rightholders, this is the strongest demand yet to reconsider the rights of the public - of users, cultural heritage institutions and scientists and of authors who build on existing material.

"It is an effort to reduce the legal uncertainty Europeans face in their everyday online interactions with copyrighted works."

Reda highlighted that copyright exceptions - which she said had the purpose of safeguarding important rights, including "quotation, parody and research and education" - are currently "entirely optional" for member states.

"Instead [this] report proposes minimum standards to protect users and creators across Europe and a review of the exceptions to ensure they are adapted to the digital environment. The report takes a strong stance against their restriction by technical or contractual means."

The commission was also asked to consider exceptions for libraries - allowing them to lend works in digital format - and for the disabled. MEPs called on the member states to ratify the Marrakesh treaty on facilitating access to books for the blind and visually impaired.

The report goes before plenary on 9 July, while EU digital economy and society commissioner Günther Oettinger is expected present a legislative proposal on copyright reform by the close of 2015.

About the author

Desmond Hinton-Beales is deputy editor of the Parliament Magazine

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