

Copyright reform is about protecting and promoting Europe's cultural heritage

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Opinion

MEPs are at odds over the Commission's copyright proposals and what the new rules should be.



MEPs are at odds over the Commission's copyright proposals and what the new rules should be | *Photo credit: Fotolia*

When the current Commission took office, it made the digital single market one of its flagship policy projects. Yet more than halfway through its mandate, the Brussels executive doesn't seem any closer to fulfilling one of its main aims.

At the heart of the digital single market is the contentious overhaul of EU copyright rules; this has proved difficult due to how wide ranging the topic is - portability of content ('geo-blocking'), online news services, the challenges of balancing authors' rights with publishers' rights.

For a while, the Commission has floated the idea of ancillary copyright laws - also known as a 'Google tax' - and finally included such a proposal in its communication published last autumn. This new tax would force search engines to pay fees to news publishers when using a snippet or an image from a news story in search results. Spain and Germany already have similar laws in place; this led Google News to stop operating in Spain.

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For Julia Reda, who in 2015 - before the Commission presented its proposals - authored Parliament's own-initiative report on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright, the Google tax "would only benefit fake news."

The Greens MEP, who is now her group's shadow rapporteur on copyright in the digital single market, points to her own country, Germany, for proof that this special copyright wouldn't work.

"Its effects are already known from Germany: internet platforms and users would stop linking to EU news with the preview images and teaser snippets that drive traffic. Fake news sites that wouldn't make use of this law would become more attractive. We have to stop this misguided proposal."

For Wout van Wijk, executive director of the Brussels-based News Media Europe, "Rights for news publishers lead to fair and sustainable agreements for the commercial use of news content, which will contribute to guaranteeing the resources needed to grant journalists the economic and legal certainty they need to keep producing independent and high quality journalism."

Another divisive topic when it comes to Brussels' overhaul of copyright rules is how to protect Europe's cultural heritage, while also promoting it and ensuring consumers have appropriate access to the file.

Angel Dzhambazki, Parliament's ECR group shadow rapporteur on copyright in the digital single market, says, "Setting the right note for a balanced and modernised copyright framework is key. While doing our best to ensure consumer protection, we must equally so protect our cultural heritage, which makes the European Union and its member states unique."

Meanwhile, Jirí Maštálka, the GUE/NGL group shadow rapporteur on the file, says he welcomes the Commission's move to modernise copyright in the digital single market, but warns that, "There is still much work ahead of us. Our main responsibility is to provide for a high level of protection of rights-holders, while allowing for reasonable fair use and access."

"At the same time, we must ensure mutual respect, and the promotion of cultural diversity, pluralism, and creativity, while bringing Europe's common cultural heritage to the fore."

The deadline for amendments to Parliament's report is 30 March.

About the author

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