

EU copyright reform: Parliament must stand up on behalf of consumers

Written by Lidia Geringer de Oedenberg on 22 January 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

Fixing the value gap without jeopardising citizens' fundamental rights is the red line in the copyright debate, says Lidia Geringer de Oedenberg.



Lidia Geringer de Oedenberg | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

Earning a living in Europe's creative industries - particularly in recent years - is not an easy task. I know this only too well; before entering politics, I worked as a journalist, then later as programming director for Polish Public Television, international cultural festival executive of Wroclaw Cantans and director of the Wroclaw Philharmonic Orchestra. Thanks to my professional background, I was able to experience copyright from all sides of the value chain.

Arts and culture hold a special place in my heart, as they do for many of my colleagues. Since

becoming an MEP, I have always seen myself as a champion for artists and authors, for creators and producers, and for all those that do the heavy lifting of expanding our abundant cultural heritage and sharing it across the globe. Europe must continue to export our rich diversity, music, films, and legacy.

Therefore, updating copyright rules to make them fit for the digital age is an important task, one that I gladly accepted as one of the shadow rapporteurs on behalf of the S&D group.

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Having listened to countless stakeholders, it is undoubtedly clear that the value gap is a challenge that urgently needs to be addressed. We must allow artists and creators earn a decent wage and offer a pathway to a sustainable standard of living for them and their families.

We have seen that European platforms such as Deezer, Spotify and SoundCloud have contributed strongly to the rebound of the content industry. This gives us a cause for hope for the creative industries in Europe.

In the UK, the entertainment market reached a new all-time high of £7.2bn in 2017; according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, the global recorded music market grew by 5.9 per cent in 2016. Continuing down this path will ensure the sustained growth of the sector in the future.

However, while these European success stories pay their fair share, the same cannot be said for all platforms. We need to ensure that all online service providers also give artists and performers a portion of their revenue. We must encourage these platforms, as well as the rest of the ecosystem (collecting societies and labels), to be transparent and open with artists, authors and performers about the revenue they generate.

Protecting the livelihood of over 12 million Europeans that work in the cultural and creative industries means that we need to deliver on these issues. We have had internal discussions within the S&D, and have reached a clear consensus across the group.

We will stand not only for the interests of artists and performers but also for ordinary workers, citizens and consumers. We will neither be fooled by, nor defend, corporate interests of any lobbying group or collecting society.

Protecting European citizens means that we should address the value gap in a way that is fully compliant with the EU fundamental rights, such as the right to privacy and data protection.

Civil society groups and numerous academics across Europe have cautioned us against filtering obligations that amount to a general monitoring of the internet.

The opinion drafted by the civil liberties committee underscores that significant work needs to be done on this text to bring it into line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EU acquis.

Protecting consumers means standing up for their interests. I could not agree more with the words of BEUC, the European Consumer Organisation, that “consumers’ legitimate expectations (e.g. access to effective redress and complaint mechanisms) are safeguarded and many of consumer’s daily and legitimate acts (e.g. producing and sharing content online out of pre-existing works in the form of user-generated content) are not considered as copyright infringements.”

According to virtually all national and European consumer association groups, the Commission’s proposal falls short of these objectives. Parliament must therefore take a strong stand in favour of consumers and answer these calls to protect them in the discussions.

The S&D group is ready for the upcoming negotiations and to work across the political spectrum to ensure that while fixing the value gap we continue to protect citizens’ fundamental rights and consumers’ interests.

About the author

Lidia Geringer de Oedenberg (PL) is Parliament’s S&D group shadow rapporteur on copyright in the digital single market

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