

Publishers back controversial EU copyright proposals

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News

Publishers in Europe have renewed calls for MEPs to back sweeping new copyright laws.



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On 20 June, Parliament's legal affairs committee will vote on what has been called the biggest potential change to copyright law in Europe in the last 30 years.

Digital rights groups are campaigning against the copyright directive, which aims to protect rightsholders in the internet age.

Critics such as Google, Twitter and Facebook say it misunderstands the way people engage with web content and risks excessive censorship.

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But publishers strongly support the directive, saying it is an attempt to reshape copyright for the internet, in particular rebalancing the relationship between copyright holders and online platforms.

A campaign aimed at persuading committee members to back the draft law is being spearhead by the European Magazine Media Association, the European Newspaper Publishers' Association, New Media Europe and the European Publishers' Council.

The three organisations say the introduction of a publishers' right at "such a critical time for the digital transformation of the press" is welcome.

The four European press publishers' associations said a publisher's right is essential for their businesses.

A statement went on, "The proposal by the European Commission to include publishers as rightsholders under the EU copyright framework is an historically important step and the necessary precondition for guaranteeing media pluralism as an essential basis for freedom of opinion and democracy in the digital world.

"Today, European newspaper and magazine publishers are reaching more consumers than ever before, but in spite of investing heavily in adapting their businesses to the realities of the digital environment, publishers still don't have an adequate way to protect their investments.

"To remain competitive and independently financed, Europe's publishers need to be able to compete on all platforms.

"While publishers have successfully transitioned from analogue to digital, they will only reach their potential with an appropriate and updated legal framework that addresses the complexities of online copyright and licensing and gives publishers the legal resource to protect their investment in the original, professional content that underpins the freedom of the press and democracy.

"What publishers need is a 'publishers' right' granting publishers the legal protection and clarity already afforded to broadcasters and film and music producers."

In her draft report, the former EPP group MEP Therese Comodini Cachia opted for a compromise solution, but this was rejected when she returned to domestic politics in her native Malta and German MEP Axel Voss took over her role on the file.

An expert study commissioned by the European Parliament argues against the adoption of the neighbouring right and proposes instead its replacement "with a presumption that press publishers are entitled to copyright/use rights in the contents of their publications."

The Parliament's internal research service said the measure was not necessary and raised objections relating to freedom of expression, while the European Commission's joint research centre also found it was not needed. Journalists' representatives, including the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, have cautioned that the provision will limit the ability of independent media organisations to "provide accurate and fair reporting."

About the author

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