

Tensions heighten ahead of crunch EU copyright reform vote

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News

German MEP Julia Reda says she has been flooded with protest messages about the proposed shake up to EU copyright law.



Julia Reda | Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual

Members of Parliament's legal affairs committee vote on the EU copyright directive draft on Wednesday, a vote Reda says it "too close to call."

Speaking at a news briefing on the draft law in Parliament on Tuesday, the Greens/EFA group deputy said she had received hundreds of emails, phone calls and tweets in the last two weeks, many of them from younger people who were concerned about the impact of the legislation.

She told reporters, “These messages, which protest the draft legislation, are from a young generation of people who have grown up with the internet.”

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“In many cases they have heard about this EU draft law from their YouTube stars which obviously has created a lot of public attention.”

She said 320,000 people had also signed a protest petition and another 50,000 posted a YouTube video called “Save Your Net”.

“There are a lot of people who will be watching the outcome of the committee vote on Wednesday very closely. In many cases, they are outraged at the way this could impact on them.”

A proposal to reform EU copyright was presented by Günther Oettinger shortly before leaving his post as European digital economy and society Commissioner.

EU member states backed the plans - while suggesting some changes - in the Council. However, six member states - Germany, Belgium, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia and The Netherlands - voted against.

Reda said, “This is very much a German-driven piece of legislation but the German government has actually voted it down.”

In the legal affairs committee, German EPP group MEP Axel Voss has been tasked with finding compromises that have majority support, but Reda claims he will need the backing of the far right Front National, at least to push through the clause on upload filters.

The draft contains two highly controversial issues - a neighbouring right for press publishers - Article 11 in the draft, and upload filters for internet platforms, Article 13.

Reda said that “after a flood of protests even Voss deems the outcome of the vote uncertain.”

She said that under the plans backed by the Commission and Axel Voss, even “snippets of news” would require licensing.

This, she says, would include “even short and purely factual headlines like ‘Angela Merkel meets Theresa May’.”

Reda says the exception for “acts of hyperlinking” that the rapporteur added “does not cover such snippets.”

“This requirement would create huge barriers to the free flow of information,” she told the briefing.

She has put forward an alternative to the draft that the committee will vote on, including a “presumption rule” that she says will simplify how press publishers handle copyright issues.

“Today, these can be complex because the copyright is held by the individual authors of articles.”

Her proposal would “establish the default legal assumption that publishers have the right to license and enforce the copyright of articles they publish.”

Her idea was championed by former MEP Therese Comodini Cachia, the former rapporteur on the file before she returned to domestic politics in Malta.

Reda says that “while funding for quality journalism faces an uncertain future, this is a larger issue not caused by copyright law. Copyright reform cannot bring back lost jobs and ad revenues.”

She said those opposed to the draft as it stands include Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the world wide web, and experts on copyright law. Those backing the law include Axel Springer, the German publishing giant, and internet companies like Google, Facebook and Twitter.

Reda said, “We support fair remuneration for authors and share the concerns over funding for quality journalism.

“The big problem is that there is a real danger of this legislation hurting the very people it is intended to help. Platforms unable or unwilling to pay licensing fees would need to disallow users from sharing links with snippets. Restricting linking, whether the Oettinger or Voss way, restricts freedom of speech and access to information online.”

She told the briefing, “After over 18 months of debate and delay it will all come down to a showdown in the committee on Wednesday.

“The contrast between those who favour the legislation and those, like me, who oppose it could not be more stark”.

The committee vote will be followed by a vote in plenary in Strasbourg in two weeks.

About the author

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