

Legal affairs committee approves controversial EU copyright proposals

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News

Parliament's legal affairs committee has voted to largely approve the Commission's proposed directive on copyright in the digital single market.



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Approval for the draft law came in a vote in Brussels on Wednesday and follows months of fierce lobbying of MEPs.

The legislation was first proposed by the Commission back in 2016 and introduces new rules regarding publishers' rights as well as setting a text and data mining exception.

The draft still needs the backing of the full plenary at another vote, due in two weeks' time, where

opponents of the draft say they still hope to overturn the result.

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The EPP group, which backed the draft, welcomed the outcome as “a step forward” in adapting current European Union copyright rules “so they better reflect the new realities and business models of the 21st century”.

However, the Greens, who were at the forefront of efforts to amend the draft, reacted angrily, citing concerns that the proposals will restrict how internet users can participate online.

Parliament’s rapporteur on the controversial dossier, German EPP group member Axel Voss, said the result comes after “long-lasting negotiations.”

He added, “It seems that the long-awaited EU copyright reform is finally reaching its conclusion in the Parliament. The negotiated directive addresses the problem of a so-called value gap in which internet online platforms bear no legal responsibility over the copyright-protected content that has been uploaded to their website by users.”

Voss said, “There have been a lot of false rumours and misinterpretations over the so-called value gap. No one is and no one will ever filter the internet. We are addressing the issue that more and more infringements are appearing on internet platforms that have as a main purpose to share the works uploaded by its users.

“These platforms make a considerable profit on the works uploaded by its users, so they can’t simply hide behind the argument that it is the users who are uploading, while the platform is making money from it.

“But don’t be mistaken: platforms such as universities, scientific databases and online encyclopaedias, which do not deal with copyright content as their primary purpose, will be exempt from the new rules”, said Voss.

The new copyright reform, the first by the EU in many years, also concerns press publishers, whose content is used by news aggregators.

On this, Voss said, “We support the line that press publishers need to receive a fair share for the use of their content on the internet, as most of the generated revenue at the moment goes to the news aggregators. I am happy that this right is now recognised.

“We want to strengthen the role of smaller publishing houses as they can now easily defend themselves against the big internet platforms and will have a better chance of receiving fair

remuneration for their content.”

“What is at stake is the survival of journalism and the protection of the quality of journalistic work. A wild world web where big platforms do not respect the copyright of publishers could end with thousands of journalists losing jobs.

“In 2013 alone, some 15,000 journalists lost their jobs because the press publishers are not being remunerated for the internet use of their products. This trend mustn’t continue”, declared Voss.

However, the Greens/EFA group, who voted against the plans, saying they would have the opposite effect.

The group’s shadow rapporteur Julia Reda said the draft will “seriously undermine basic internet freedoms.”

A statement issued after the vote said the proposals will see the introduction of a ‘link tax’, which will require internet platforms to pay a license fee when users share links to news articles that include even short snippets of the article’s content.

The proposal on automatic upload filters, the Greens fear, will block any photos, videos and texts users upload to websites that raise any suspicion of being copyright infringement.

Reda said, “These measures would seriously undermine basic internet freedoms. People will run into trouble doing everyday things like discussing the news and expressing themselves online. Putting the special interests of large media companies ahead of our ability to participate freely online is unacceptable.

“While there are legitimate issues at stake here, these blunt and misguided policy measures would do more harm than good. Requiring licenses to spread the news won't help fund journalism; it will simply shut down the sharing of professional news content and threaten smaller publishers, who most rely on their articles being shared.

“The plans for automatic filters are equally short-sighted. While their advocates claim they will help make sure creatives get paid, in reality they will mainly end up blocking legitimate and harmless creations like memes and parodies, and kill off European platforms and startups who can’t afford to comply.

“I will challenge this outcome and request a vote in the European Parliament next month. We can still overturn this result and preserve the free internet.”

Her group colleague, Heidi Hautala, the Greens coordinator on the legal affairs committee, added, “We have already successfully defeated one of the harmful elements of these proposals. At the final hour, we managed to convince the majority on the committee to put the needs of authors ahead of those of publishers.

“We found a compromise that will avoid transferring authors’ rights and income to publishers. Publishers are an important part of the cultural production, but they are already the stronger party and there is no reason to further strengthen their legal rights over authors.”

About the author

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