

Updated: EU copyright debate turns sinister as MEP receives bomb threat

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News

The fierce debate over EU copyright reforms has taken a worrying turn with a bomb threat being made against the senior German MEP who has steered the legislation through Parliament.



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It has come to light that German police in Bonn are investigating a bomb threat against the copyright directive's rapporteur, Axel Voss, an EPP member.

The regional daily newspaper *General-Anzeiger* reports the existence of a post on a Finnish forum which states that a device planted at the CDU politician's office in Bonn will be detonated if the European Parliament votes for the planned changes to EU copyright law next week.

On Monday, Voss was not immediately available for comment but a CDU source condemned the threat, saying, “This is totally unacceptable and is very worrying.”

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During the week of March 25 in Strasbourg, MEPs will vote on the new copyright directive in the plenary.

The reform seeks to create a “level playing field” for all actors from the creative sector in the European digital single market, whilst ensuring continued access for citizens to a wide array of content.

The vote marks the final stage in what has been a protracted and stormy process in pushing the directive through Parliament. The debate has seen internet giants like Google square up to organisations representing publishers and artists.

A parliamentary source said, “There has been an unprecedented level of scaremongering on this issue from anti-copyright campaigners.”

“There has been an unprecedented level of scaremongering on this issue from anti-copyright campaigners” **Parliamentary source**

Speaking on Tuesday, Ilias Konteas, executive director of the European Newspaper Publishers’ Association (ENPA), told this website: “ENPA understands that an investigation is taking place. We condemn such threats and everyone interested in a fair and democratic debate should do so as well.”

This group and others are now making a last-minute plea to MEPs to approve the new rules in next week’s key vote.

A letter urging Parliament to back the move has now been signed by 269 groups.

The letter, seen by this website, says, “We, the undersigned organisations, representing authors, composers, writers, journalists, photographers and others working in all artistic fields, news agencies, book, press and music publishers, audiovisual and independent music producers, call on the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament to adopt the Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market.”

It goes on, “This Directive has been long sought to create a much-needed level playing field for all actors of the creative sector in the European Digital Single Market, whilst giving citizens better access

to a wider array of content. This is a historical opportunity. We need an internet that is fair and sustainable for all.”

It concludes, “This is why we urge policymakers to adopt the Directive quickly, as agreed in trilogue negotiations.”

In the latest development, more than 270 organisations from the cultural sector came together on Tuesday to offer their “clear and strong support” for the copyright directive and to call on MEPs to adopt the draft law next week in Strasbourg.

Speaking at a news briefing in Brussels ahead of the key plenary vote, Jean-Noël Tronc, Vice-President of European Grouping of Authors’ Societies (GESAC), said, “We ask MEPs to stand up for a strong Europe against tech giants’ manipulation. We ask MEPs to side with its citizens, creators and creative sector against the exploitive practices of a few platforms and their supporters.”

Another speaker, Helen Smith, Executive Chair IMPALA, said, “Platforms facilitate a unique relationship between citizens and creators. The directive will boost this. It shifts responsibility away from citizens and encourages new entrants to the market. It is part of a wider bid by the EU to deliver fairness and sustainability in the online world.”

Meanwhile, a Harris Interactive poll of 6,600 people in France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Greece and Romania, is said to show that European citizens want stronger regulation of tech giants like Google and Facebook.

“ENPA understands that an investigation [into the bomb threat] is taking place. We condemn such threats and everyone interested in a fair and democratic debate should do so as well” **Ilias Konteas, Executive Director of the European Newspaper Publishers’ Association (ENPA)**

The poll, it is claimed, indicates that a large majority of Europeans think that the latest EU Parliamentary term has not done enough to regulate big tech giants’ practices.

Ahead of the crucial EU Copyright Directive vote, respondents said they would like to see the EU create safeguards so that dominant tech companies are obliged to remunerate creators fairly when their works are used on internet platforms.

The poll showed that: 64 percent of Europeans believe that over the past 5 years the European Union has not done enough to regulate the power of the U.S. tech giants; 74 percent of Europeans think that when the tech giants speak out on an issue, “they do so to protect their own economic interests rather than the public interest” and 80 percent of Europeans are in favour of the European Union implementing rules to guarantee the remuneration of artists and content creators for the distribution of their content on internet platforms.

Reaction came from Europe for Creators, a professional organisation of writers, musicians, producers, comedians, and filmmakers from across Europe.

A spokesman said, “The use of tech giants’ massive communications infrastructure for their own commercial and political agenda, and the millions they spend defending their positions, seems to have led Europeans to consider that the tech giants are neither neutral nor altruistic.”

The results, he said, send “a strong message for European politicians with two months to go before

parliamentary elections. The debate over the tech giants is intensifying around issues like “fake news,” market dominance - the copyright directive regulating the distribution of content on the big platforms is part of this - as well as revenue tax planned at national and European level.”

The spokesman added, “The results of the poll show that Europeans care about creators being paid fairly by large online platforms. One week from a landmark vote on copyright, their views send a strong message to Members of the European Parliament, who will soon decide the fate of a Copyright Directive that tech giants are vehemently trying to block.”

“This underscores the sentiment that the big platforms are capturing almost the entire market value. It’s only fair that this value be shared with the millions of European creators whose work is distributed online, generating profits for the big platforms,” he added.

No one from Google, You Tube or Facebook was immediately available for comment.

About the author

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